

BRING DEMOCRACY HOME
Katrina vanden Heuvel

THE VIEW FROM IRAN
Scott Ritter • Negar Azimi

The Nation.

IN GOD'S COUNTRY

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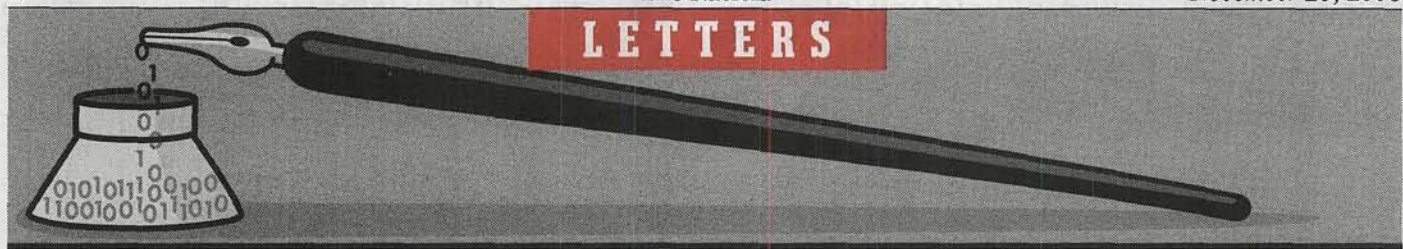


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A GIRL CAN DREAM, CAN'T SHE?

Boise, Idaho

■ Thank you, William Greider, for "Pelosi's Moment" [Oct. 30]. I was pleased to see there is a Democratic legislative and leadership agenda in the wings. There is also excitement out here in the hinterlands for a new agenda. But as far as Nancy Pelosi is concerned, I would like to remind readers that there is a scenario that isn't being discussed in any of the media. Here it is in a nutshell: Nancy Pelosi becomes the Speaker of the House in January after Democrats take over the House; Democrats also take the Senate, by the smallest majority; Speaker Pelosi holds impeachment hearings for Cheney and Bush; the House impeaches both; the Senate upholds the impeachment and removes both from office. Now comes the Republicans' worst fear. Who is third in line for the presidency? We now have our first woman President of the United States! President Pelosi! Some may laugh, but...

QUANNAH SANTIAGO

GREIDER REPLIES

Washington, DC

■ I like Quannah Santiago's scenario for how Nancy Pelosi becomes President, but I'm afraid she has described exactly why Pelosi will not go down that impeachment road—it looks like a constitutional coup d'état to make herself President. Still, it is a neat idea.

WILLIAM GREIDER

KABUL'S PRO, DC'S AMATEURS

New York City

■ The context in which some of my statements appeared in David Corn's "Who's Running Afghan Policy?" [Oct. 30] may have given a wrong impression. When I referred to diplomats "with no regional experience," I was not referring to US Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann, although the context in which this quotation appeared gave that impression. The part of my discussion with Corn during which I made this statement dealt with officials in Washington rather than Kabul. Ambassador Neumann has worked extensively in the Middle East and South Asia region. With the limited tools at his disposal in a country that is not a high priority for the Bush Administration, Neumann has worked very hard to make this operation successful.

BARNETT R. RUBIN

BAD TIMES, BAD MEDIA, BAD POSTS

New York City

■ After nearly thirty-five years as an announcer, reporter, anchor, writer and producer in radio, television and with a wire service, I quit

because I could not take the way the business was going. Going? Hell, it got there. I worked in small markets (a radio station in Sumter, South Carolina) and large (as a producer at NBC News, Chicago). At times I was proud of our coverage—of the deaths of President Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; of the cold war in all its machinations; the Vietnam War in all its soul-burning recklessness; and Watergate, where even Richard Nixon did not try to trash the Constitution. I also was ashamed of the media's handling of the first Bush War; thank goodness I am not part of the media for Bush II, the man or the war.

As reporters, we acted within the law and helped make certain that the law, and the Constitution, were upheld. Now, however, the media allow George W. Bush to abrogate those laws and, above all, the Constitution. What happened to the likes of Edward R. Murrow questioning Joe McCarthy? To Walter Cronkite calling Chicago police "thugs"? To the Huntleys and Brinkleys? To the others who worked hard to bring the events, the emotions, the truth to Americans? What happened to the truth?

Long before the "Watergate rule" Eric Alterman cites ["The Liberal Media," Oct. 30], the wire services required at least two sources before going with a story. I was with the Associated Press when an AP reporter could not report, say, a plane crash he or she witnessed (or even survived) unless someone corroborated it. Alterman asks whether it should be obvious that "anonymous [e-mail] posters on a public bulletin board do not represent anyone or anything but their own silly little minds?" Of course it should, and, not to sound like the old fogey I am becoming, back in my day we wouldn't have done that—not even the worst of us at the worst of times. Thank goodness there were no blogs then for the weak of mind or the faint of gut.

Despite their claims, the mainstream media no longer "hold themselves to higher standards than the Drudge-driven political blogosphere." Shame on them. Shame on all of us for letting them get away with it.

MIKE WRIGHT

New York City

■ In relating the story behind the removal of anti-Semitic posts from the MoveOn.org website, Eric Alterman confuses the chronology and the eventual reportage of our concerns in the tabloid press. As is our common practice, after learning of the anti-Semitic posts our first course of action was to attempt to notify MoveOn officials of their existence and to request their removal. We did just that in an electronic message sent August 31. A copy of that message was later obtained by the *New York Post*—not from us—and was quoted in its story, which ran

September 5. We did not "run to the media," as Alterman suggests, nor was our letter motivated by a desire to "blame MoveOn" for the posts. In fact, in our public statements we were the first to acknowledge that MoveOn officials were not responsible for the anti-Semitic posts. And we commended them immediately after learning that the posts had been responsibly removed.

ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN

National director, Anti-Defamation League

ALTERMAN REPLIES

New York City

■ What Abraham Foxman omits from his letter is that, as I reported, his organization made no effort to speak to anyone at MoveOn.org before publicizing the silly anonymous postings on the MoveOn message boards. Perhaps it did send an e-mail. So what? I rarely read the e-mails that come to me from unfamiliar sources and neither, I imagine, do most busy people. A simple phone call to Eli Pariser's office as a follow-up would have solved the situation before it turned into a misleading media maelstrom, as the postings were taken down as soon as the MoveOn folks learned about them from the media. But the ADL preferred to publicize the meaningless meanderings of some still-unidentified people instead. That's hardly responsible—or even serious behavior, when it comes to identifying significant incidents of "defamation."

Foxman's note that the *New York Post* did not receive the story from the ADL is true. That's why I stated in the column that the item was fed to the *Post* by the Lieberman campaign, which in this case appears to have acted as a cut-out for the ADL. If Foxman can say for certain that no one at the ADL was involved in alerting the campaign—which he does not say in his letter—then Foxman has my apology on this extremely minor point. Overall, however, the story stands.

ERIC ALTERMAN

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE DC TIMES

Washington, DC

■ In his October 9 attack on the *Washington Times*, "Hell of a Times," Max Blumenthal includes two accusations against me, both of which are totally false. First he repeats a charge he says was made by former *Times* employee George Archibald that "*Human Events* had planned to publish an article by him this September detailing instances of racism and sexism at the *Times* but that, under pressure from [*Times* editors] Pruden and Coombs, *Human Events* editor in chief Thomas Winter spiked the piece."

This is a complete fabrication. We had no plans to run Archibald's article, and I received

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EDITORIAL

Bring Democracy Home

Former President Jimmy Carter, who is arguably more identified with the struggle to guarantee free and fair elections than anyone in the world, gets an interesting response these days when he talks about observing voting overseas. "The Carter Center has monitored more than fifty elections, all of them held under contentious, troubled or dangerous conditions," he says. "When I describe these activities, either in the US or in foreign forums, the almost inevitable questions are Why don't you observe the election in Florida? and How do you explain the serious problems with elections there?"

The American people are waking up and realizing that for all the Bush Administration's talk of promoting democracy abroad, the US electoral system fails to do the same at home. With the approach of the midterm elections, there is justified alarm about how easy it is to hack electronic voting machines and that in many states these machines have no paper trail.

While it is heartening to see the increased focus on the vulnerabilities and flaws of these machines, these are not the only problems that cry out for reform. What about voting districts that are rigged to be uncompetitive? What about loopholes in campaign finance law that give corporations huge influence over legislation? What about partisan secretaries of state who decide who can vote and which votes will be counted? What about modern-day Jim Crow laws and tactics that suppress the vote?

Isn't it time we did some democracy promotion at home? Here are ten ideas for how to repair and strengthen our broken voting system:

1. Establish an election day holiday. Our nation has one of the lowest voter-participation rates in the world. Puerto Rico, where election day is a holiday, has one of the highest. Shouldn't

we make this basic commitment so that it is as easy as possible for voters to get to the polls?

2. Establish national standards for elections. As voting rights activist Steven Hill points out, "Election management in the United States amounts to a decentralized hodgepodge of over 3,000 counties and 9,000 townships with few national standards to guide them." We need to set standards for all aspects of our elections, from voting machines, to provisional ballots, to paper trails, to poll worker training, to voter protection. The creation of the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC) through the Help America Vote Act of 2002 was a step in the right direction. But the EAC must be empowered to determine and enforce crucial reforms, and these reforms should *not* be unfunded mandates. We need a real, ongoing federal commitment to helping states pay for elections.

3. Promote and protect the right to vote. An MIT/CalTech study in 2001 estimated that 3 million voters were disenfranchised because of registration problems. One good solution is Election Day Registration. Six states currently use EDR, and voter turnout is 8 to 15 percentage points higher than the national average. Where there are registration or ID problems, voters should be permitted to cast provisional ballots, and every provisional ballot cast by an eligible voter should be counted. Finally, statewide voter databases must be accurate and complete. No voter should be removed from the list without notification and the opportunity to contest the removal.

4. Require reliable voting machines and a paper trail. We have seen that electronic voting machines can be hacked and votes altered. But there is no requirement for a paper trail so that these flawed machines can be audited. Is there any reason our ATMs should provide receipts but our voting machines shouldn't? Representative Rush Holt has introduced legislation that would require all voting systems to provide a voter-verified paper trail that

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would serve as the official ballot for recounts and audits. Also, impartial security experts should have access to the voting machine software for quality assurance. Finally, the EAC should establish standards for voting technology and update them as necessary.

5. Require nonpartisan election management. It is an outrage that in 2000 Bush's Florida campaign co-chair Katherine Harris oversaw that state's elections, or that this year in Ohio Ken Blackwell is overseeing the election while running for governor. Election officials should be barred from participation in election campaigns. We need to establish strict conflict-of-interest laws.

6. Make voting easy and trustworthy. Poll workers need rigorous training in voting regulations and in assisting non-English-speaking voters and voters with disabilities. Sites should be wheelchair accessible and offer instructions in braille and large print and with audio. Minimum standards need to be established about numbers of poll workers and voting systems at every site so that all voters, regardless of income or race, are treated equally. Voters should receive written information about their voting rights when they register and when they vote. Further, challenging the eligibility of voters for partisan gain must be stopped and prosecuted. Observers should not merely be permitted but encouraged to monitor polling places without notice. Exclusionary practices like requiring voter IDs should be rejected.

7. Re-enfranchise citizens denied their voting rights. Nearly 5 million Americans cannot vote because of former felony convictions, and many states either permanently deny former felons the right to vote or make it difficult for that right to be restored. The right to vote should immediately and automatically be returned after a person has served a sentence. The United States remains the only industrial democracy that denies former felons this right. If you have paid your debt to society, you should be welcomed back into the process of shaping that society.

8. End the duopoly. Both parties are guilty of redrawing Congressional district lines to protect incumbent seats. Some suggest adopting the Iowa model, which uses nonpartisan former judges to oversee redistricting. More important, we need to move beyond our winner-take-all system. Some examples: proportional representation, in which 10 percent of the vote wins 10 percent of the seats; instant-runoff voting, in which low-scoring candidates are eliminated and their supporters' second-choice votes are added to those who remain, until one candidate gets a majority; and fusion voting, which allows two or more parties to nominate the same candidate on separate ballot lines, so that people can support third parties without worrying about a "wasted" vote. All these plans help third-party candidates. And while we're at it, let's end the two major parties' control of the debates by setting FCC standards to assure that broadcasters cannot exclude serious third-party candidates.

9. Establish a constitutional right to vote. Most Americans don't realize that the right to vote is not in our Constitution. At the moment, our voting system is separate and unequal—consisting of thousands of different election jurisdictions. If a right-to-vote amendment were adopted, it would allow citizens to use

COMMENT

the courts to demand equal protection of their right to vote—a strategy that could be used to establish minimum national standards for voting systems, fight disenfranchisement and insure that all votes are counted correctly.

10. Fund campaigns publicly. Public funding of elections through general revenues is the best investment America can make in democracy. Big-money politics gives unfair influence to the rich while undermining candidates with less money. It is the antithesis of democracy.

The last two elections reveal why America needs a democracy-reconstruction project. No matter which party prevails November 7, small-d democrats must make these reforms their top priority.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

COMMENT

The 'Off-Year Primary'

It has become fashionable to refer to the hurdles that presidential contenders must leap before any actual primary votes are cast as primaries of a different sort: There's the "wealth primary" to measure fundraising capability; the "Beltway primary" to measure how party insiders are lining up; and now the "blogosphere primary" to measure where netroots activists are gravitating. But the most important pre-primary "primary" is still the one in which the contenders try to make themselves useful—by lending their star power and giving generously to candidates in tight races—during the election cycle prior to the presidential year.

If there's a winner in the 2006 version of that contest, it's Senator Barack Obama, who started the season swearing off presidential ambitions and ended it with a "well, maybe" flirtation that seemed to capture everyone's imagination. The Illinois Democrat successfully made himself this year's marquee attraction, showing up at rallies for all key Senate and House candidates and even for struggling contenders, like California gubernatorial hopeful Phil Angelides, who were unlikely to win but certain to remember the favor. If Obama's just teasing us (or just selling his latest book) he'll end up helping presumed frontrunner Hillary Clinton by drawing attention away from the crowd of other Democrats competing to be the "anti-Hillary." If he's serious, his popularity positions him as Clinton's worst nightmare—aside from the unlikely prospect of a re-engaged Al Gore.

With Clinton focusing a respectable amount of her attention on a sure-bet re-election bid for her New York Senate seat, Obama's most serious competition for the national spotlight came from Clinton's stand-in, husband Bill, whose in-your-face retorts to Fox News interviewer Chris Wallace made him the unlikely "fighting Democrat" of the fall. Between them, the former President and Obama sucked the air out of the season for Senator John Kerry and his 2004 running mate, John Edwards, as well as for Senator Russ Feingold and Gen. Wesley Clark. Kerry closed the campaign sparring with Republicans who tried to suggest that the Vietnam vet was somehow insensitive to troops in Iraq. Edwards, who has been busy moving to the left, concentrated on building

bases in the early primary state of South Carolina and the first caucus state of Iowa, where he campaigned even for state legislative candidates. Feingold kept an active schedule, particularly in Southern and Western states, and made a point of campaigning for candidates who shared his antiwar, pro-civil liberties positions. But neither could compete with Obama's star power.

Nor could Clark: He cut a tough antiwar ad backing Senate candidate Ned Lamont of Connecticut, but Obama, who once campaigned for Lamont's opponent, incumbent Senator Joe Lieberman, grabbed headlines with a late October announcement that "Ned Lamont and I share a commitment to bringing our troops home safely from Iraq." No matter the election result, helping Lamont was a smart move, especially now that the Democrat who hustled hardest for netroots support, moderate former Virginia Governor Mark Warner, has taken himself out of the running.

On the Republican side, Virginia Senator George Allen began 2006 as a favorite of party insiders desperate for a "new face" to put on the Bush Administration's foreign and domestic policies. More trusted by right-wingers than Arizona Senator John McCain or former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Allen was supposed to run a re-election campaign that would be a blueprint for his 2008 race. Instead, after he got caught spewing a racial epithet, his campaign turned into a train wreck. Rather than coasting to re-election while aiding other Republicans, Allen spent the fall fighting for his political life. Count him out as a 2008 contender.

That's good news for McCain, who jetted into every key state and seemed to cut more personal testimonial TV ads for GOP candidates than the President—or other prominent Republicans. Party stalwarts may not like McCain, but they recognized this fall that they need his veneer of independence. Giuliani made the rounds as well, but he lacked McCain's energy and focus.

ON THE WEB

As Rick Santorum lags behind his Democratic challenger in the Pennsylvania senatorial race, Max Blumenthal traces the theological roots of his positions on abortion and gay marriage, which lead him to a cabal of Catholic conservatives. Talk about brain-drain: Tom Engelhardt examines the implications of Britain's hiring Al Gore to lobby the United States on the need to fight global warming. Jeremy Scahill and Garrett Ordower report on Blackwater USA's hiring of Kenneth Starr to fight wrongful death suits against the company by families of four contractors killed in Iraq.

On election night and the day after, Katrina vanden Heuvel, John Nichols, David Corn, William Greider, Marc Cooper, Liza Featherstone, Ari Berman and others will deliver breaking news and analysis on the midterms.

Making its debut: "Around the Nation" (www.thenation.com/events), a new feature that lists political, social and cultural events of interest to progressives; it includes online tools that allow grassroots organizations to publicize their events.

Indeed, if there was a competitor with McCain for the MVR—Most Valuable Republican—title, it was outgoing Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who began the last week before the election barnstorming through rural Iowa while hiring key staffers from outgoing Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Bush isn't running for the GOP nomination but hasn't shot down speculation from the Romney camp about a Mitt-and-Jeb ticket. In a party that knows it must break with George W. Bush, but doesn't want to stray too far, Romney is practicing smart politics.

At the end of the first pre-primary "primary," however, neither Romney nor McCain, nor any of the other Democrats, had played the politics of 2006—and, by extension, the politics of 2008—as smart as Obama.

JOHN NICHOLS

War Criminals, Beware

On November 14 a group of lawyers and other experts will come before the German federal prosecutor and ask him to open a criminal investigation targeting Donald Rumsfeld, Alberto Gonzales and other key Bush Administration figures for war crimes. The recent passage of the Military Commissions Act provides a central argument for the legal action, under the doctrine of universal jurisdiction: It demonstrates the intent of the Bush Administration to immunize itself legally from prosecution in the United States, even for the most serious crimes.

The Rumsfeld action was announced at a conference in New York City in late October titled "Is Universal Jurisdiction an Effective Tool?" The doctrine allows domestic courts to prosecute international crimes regardless of where the crime was committed, the nationality of the perpetrator or the nationality of the victim. It is reserved for only the most heinous offenses: genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including torture. A number of countries around the world have enacted universal jurisdiction statutes; even the United States allows it for certain terrorist offenses and torture.

Many of the participants in the New York conference were human rights lawyers who have been expanding the use of universal jurisdiction since it was employed against former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. In a recent case brought in Spain, for example, Argentine Adolfo Scilingo was tried and found guilty of crimes against humanity he committed in Argentina and sentenced to serve a 640-year prison term [see Geoff Pingree and Lisa Abend, "Spanish Justice," October 9]. The decision was made to try to prosecute Rumsfeld in Germany because its laws facilitate the use of universal jurisdiction.

The conference was sponsored by the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), which is bringing the case against Rumsfeld, and by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), a network of 141 national human rights organizations founded in 1922.

An earlier case against Rumsfeld was brought two years ago in Germany by CCR on behalf of four Iraqi victims of Abu Ghraib, drawing largely on documents and photos that revealed abuse at the prison. As the case was being considered, a security conference

loomed in Munich. Rumsfeld, who could have been served papers or even arrested, refused to attend unless the case was dismissed. It was dismissed February 10; Rumsfeld flew to Germany the next day.

The reason the prosecutor gave for the dismissal was that there was "no reason to believe that the accused would not be prosecuted in the United States"—notwithstanding powerful evidence that the officials who controlled prosecution were themselves part of the conspiracy to commit war crimes. The new complaint will be based on the failure of US authorities to investigate and prosecute high-level officials.

The case will draw on a powerful new argument. The Military Commissions Act of 2006, which the President promoted and recently signed into law, provides retroactive immunity for civilians who violated the War Crimes Act, including officials of the Bush Administration. Such an attempt to provide immunity for their crimes, it will be argued, is in itself evidence of an effort to block prosecution of those crimes. Indeed, according to Scott Horton, chair of the International Law Committee of the New York City Bar Association, when Yugoslavia sought to immunize senior government officials, the United States declared the act itself to be evidence of such a conspiracy.

The new case will introduce other important elements as well. Lawyers who served as advocates, architects and enablers of prisoner abuse policies, like Alberto Gonzales and John Yoo, will be added as defendants. Abuse in Guantánamo will be added to that in Abu Ghraib. The complaint will present new evidence showing responsibility for torture and prisoner abuse at the highest levels of the chain of command.

Wolfgang Kaleck, a German human rights lawyer who is bringing the case in cooperation with CCR, FIDH and other groups, told the conference in New York that he is often asked, "Do you really expect Rumsfeld to be arrested for war crimes? His answer is that he doesn't expect it immediately. 'But we make it possible that someday Rumsfeld will be arrested,'" he says. According to Kaleck, the German government regularly receives calls from potential high-level visitors asking, "Are there any complaints against me?"

CALVIN TRILLIN

AN EXPLANATION OF KARL ROVE'S CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS

It's possible that Rove has got a plan
To keep Republicans from being buried:
Announcing that they've foiled a bombing plot
By two gay Muslims who had just got married.

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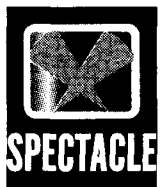
Antoine Bernard, FIDH executive director, says that although there have been few convictions so far based on universal jurisdiction, "now fear is not just on the side of the victims but also of the torturers." And that, supporters argue, will have a deterrent effect on government officials who contemplate using torture.

Peter Weiss, vice president of both CCR and FIDH and an elder statesman of international human rights law, notes that it took fifty years to get the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision outlawing school segregation, but during all that time people kept bringing cases that eventually changed the legal system's fundamental position. "New norms are being constituted to deal with the reality on the ground," he said. "Later those norms become real, practical, enforceable law."

JEREMY BRECHER AND BRENDAN SMITH

Jeremy Brecher is a historian. Brendan Smith is a legal analyst. They are the editors, with Jill Cutler, of In the Name of Democracy: American War Crimes in Iraq and Beyond (Metropolitan).

The Tao of Borat



Myron Cohen he's not, but Sacha Baron Cohen is pretty much the hottest thing in sketch comedy now. One reason is the question his shtick poses: What are we laughing at?

Fresh from British TV, Baron Cohen found his American niche on HBO in 2003 by playing a benighted hip-hopster named Ali G, the pretend host of a show aimed at educating youth. In that persona Baron Cohen landed interviews with some very important people, who had to suffer his grotesque malapropisms and gnarly sex talk, to the great amusement of the audience.

There were other characters on *Da Ali G Show*, including Borat Sagdiyev, a gross but gregarious "journalist" from Kazakhstan who snares hapless Americans in situations they can't escape, since they know they're being filmed. Camera manners compelled Southern ladies to tolerate Borat's toilet pronouncements and a town council to observe five minutes of fidgety silence in honor of an invented Kazakh massacre. Baron Cohen also got red-blooded barflies to sing along with his ersatz anthem, "Throw the Jew Down the Well."

Variations on these themes shape Baron Cohen's new film, *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit of Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. This flimsy mock doc, in the spirit of gross-out shows like *Punk'd* and *Jackass*, might have faded into dating-movie oblivion but for the vehement reaction of the Kazakh government. It didn't appreciate Borat's references to a national wine made from equine urine, or his observation that "America is strange country: Women can vote but horses cannot." By protesting, the Kazakhs gave Baron Cohen a place on US news pages. But there's more to this comic than politically incorrect creds.

Not too long ago, stand-up stars like Sam Kinison and Andrew Dice Clay went after women, gays and immigrants in a revanchist show of spleen, and it was boffo. But backlash

entertainment has lost its sting—if only because it no longer represents a dissent from the orthodoxies of social politics. There's a new comedy in which the ambiguities of laughter are explored and the connections between mockery and sadism are revealed. If you examine your response to Borat, you'll have to face some dicey truths about the joy of bigotry.

After all, who is the butt of his jokes: those Americans straining to be polite to a foreigner or the foreigner who appalls them by expressing primitive sentiments? Are the rich and famous who curdle at the stupidity of Ali G the objects of our laughter, or is it Ali G, who could be the ignorant son of immigrants? Baron Cohen's comedy rubs against fear and loathing of the Muslim Other. But what about those Jew jokes—why are *they* so funny? And why are some of the friendly Americans Borat encounters so willing to join in the fun?

Baron Cohen is a Cambridge-educated Jew with Iranian roots, and this combination of erudition and estrangement allows him to cast a philosophical aura over his insults. It's like watching a Catskills *tumbler* (those Jewish comics whose job was to stir up the house with offense) through a Sartrean lens. You're left with the feeling that everyone enjoys the spectacle of bigotry, as long as it's couched in humor.

Depending on your sensitivity, you might conclude that this delight could become blood lust in the right circumstances, or you might leave the theater high on your biases. Fans of performers like Baron Cohen call them equal-opportunity offenders, but if the targets aren't on an equal footing with the audience, which side is the comic on?

Some neo-*tumblers* are asking this question in a truly ambitious way. Sarah Silverman, whose audacious film *Jesus Is Magic* is now on DVD, offers a richly observed meditation on the sadistic roots of mockery. Silverman rounds up the usual PC suspects, but she also insults Jews, and her ultimate intentions are conveyed by her persona: a terminally narcissistic Jewish American Princess. She uses a stereotype to evoke other stereotypes, forcing her audience to confront the guilty pleasure of shoving other people into these demeaning roles.

Comics like Silverman and Baron Cohen revive the strategy of Lenny Bruce: The jokes stick in your craw, if you let them. But their humor also plays in a conservative era that cherishes the sadistic gratification of bashing the vulnerable and the oppressed. It's the perfect comedy for an ideologically ambivalent time. Given that double message, much depends on how these jokers deal with their own identities. Silverman does that with a wink. "I'm just me," she bumbles, "...white." But Baron Cohen can't afford such candor. His act depends on the pretense that he's transracial. Try watching him with the fact of his whiteness in mind and you can't really enjoy the show.

A dexterous delivery allows Baron Cohen to deny his race and class—which in turn allows his audience to do the same. This suspension of disbelief may free up the yuks, but the laughter is just as primitive as Borat's barbaric ways. And that's no joke.

RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Richard Goldstein writes about the connections between pop culture, politics and sexuality.

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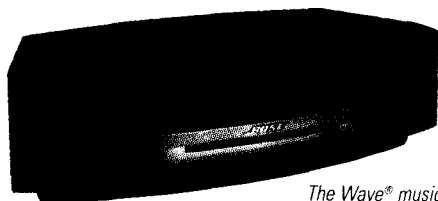
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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

The Message of Campaign 2006

Is the half-hidden message of the 2006 campaign season that in the presidential showdown in 2008 we'll have Senator John McCain running as both a Republican and a Democrat? It would certainly sweep away any remaining doubts that there is any difference between the two major parties. And maybe it would open up some space for outside challengers, assuming all vociferous opponents have not by that time been arrested and stuck behind barbed wire in an internment camp.

What candidate would be more appropriate as the next Commander in Chief than the mad ex-POW who now serves as Arizona's senior senator? McCain, don't forget, was under consideration by his senatorial colleague Democrat John Kerry to be his running mate in 2004 before Kerry picked John Edwards, whose prime distinction is that he is married to Elizabeth Edwards, the only Democrat I've seen in recent times to display any of the qualities one might hope for in a Democratic presidential nominee.

McCain is obviously aware of his impending responsibilities as the fusion candidate. As Congress prepared its craven assent to President Bush's destruction of habeas corpus with the Military Commissions Act, he was one of three Republican senators who raised a bleat of protest. True, as is always the case with McCain, it was a very brief bleat, but as against the complaisance of Democrats like Joe Biden (who chortled that the Democrats would be happy to sit on the sidelines as the Constitution thumped into the trash bin) this counts as a lion's roar.

Even the word "bleat" is a fierce overstatement of the noise raised by any senator, including McCain, as Bush finally junked legal restrictions on the role of the military in domestic law enforcement, a deed consummated with his signature on the same day, October 17, that he signed the Military Commissions Act, which permits warrantless incarceration and torture of suspected terrorists.

Speaking of what is now Public Law 109-364, Senator Pat Leahy whispered into the Congressional Record September 29 that he had "grave reservations about certain provisions" of the bill. The language of these provisions, Leahy said, "subverts solid, longstanding posse comitatus statutes that limit the military's involvement in law enforcement, thereby making it easier for the President to declare martial law."

At least when the Military Commissions Act was striding through Congress, the press did demurely note the fact, albeit without alarm sirens, that habeas corpus is headed toward a display case in the Smithsonian. The only story I've seen on the significance of Public Law 109-364 came from Frank Morales, on Uruknet, describing its license for the President "to declare a 'public emergency' and station troops anywhere in America, taking control of state-based National Guard units...in order to 'suppress public disorder.'"

Does McCain's latest statement on the war in Iraq—a call for 20,000 fresh US troops to be sent there—square with the Demo-



BEAT THE
DEVIL

crats' position on the war? The answer to this is, of course, that the Democrats don't have a position on the war beyond the de facto one of trying to make sure no peacenik candidates slip past the guard post supervised by Rahm Emanuel, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Like the American people overall, the majority of ordinary Democrats want US forces to quit Iraq in the immediate or relatively near future. This was not the posture of Democratic candidates, particularly in tight races. Most of them have talked about

withdrawal as a matter of many months. The Democratic leadership would sign on to a McCain beef-up plan in minutes, flailing away at Bush for the next two years for losing the war. For the left position we'll probably have to wait for the commission headed by James Baker or a mutiny by the generals, who are aware—just as they told Representative John Murtha this time last year—that the war is a bust and it's time to quit.

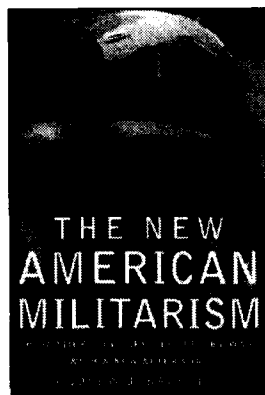
Campaign 2006 has shown us clearly enough that the outer limit of popular sanction is the ability to lodge a formal protest on election day. Such protest can have actual consequences only in the very few remaining Congressional districts not gerrymandered into permanent incumbency or rotted out with vote fraud. Mostly the voters seem to have felt that both parties are pretty awful, but as the outfit that's been running the country without opposition for six years the Republicans deserve to get a kick in the pants.

The fact that this protest is purely formal is attested by the adamant refusal of the Democrats to offer anything by way of substantive alternative, beyond saying that Bush is an incompetent fellow. Indeed, the substantive effect of Campaign 2006 has been to state in terms plain enough for a simpleton to understand that resistance is futile, since both Republicans and Democrats agree that the Bill of Rights is a dead letter and that wars must go on, and jobs disappear, despite overwhelming popular disagreement with such policies.

Pick a topic—the war, the economy, a 2 million-plus prison population, the environment, the condition of organized labor, the Constitution. Can you recall any Democrat this fall having said something on such a topic suggesting that in the event Democrats recapture the House or the Senate or both, anything of consequence might occur?

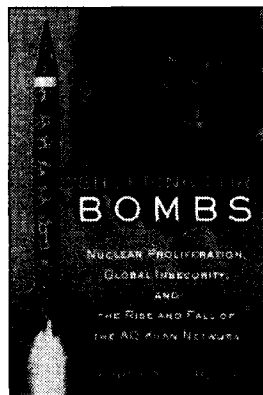
The week before polling day the *New York Times* had a story about the business lobby's plans to sweep away all irksome laws and regulations passed in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom scandals. Did anyone cry, "That's just the kind of corporate villainy we need the Democrats to guard us from!" Of course not. It would be as unrealistic as to hope that a Congress controlled in both chambers by Democrats would simply vote to deny Bush the money for the war in Iraq.

As things stand in organized politics today a purely formal protest is the most we can hope for, and the significance of this fall's campaign is that no one has pretended otherwise. ■



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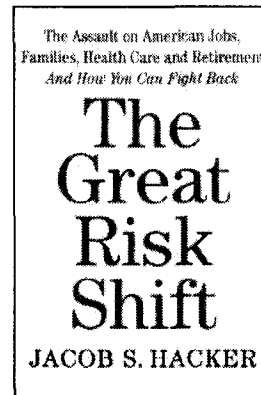
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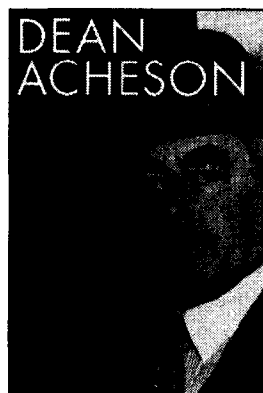


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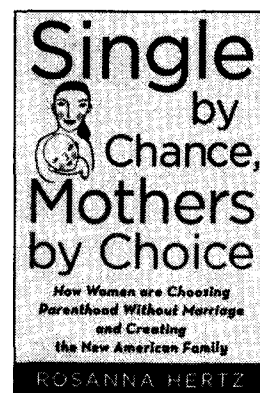
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KATHA POLLITT

HRC: Can't Get No Respect

If people keep making sexist attacks on Hillary Rodham Clinton, I may just have to vote for her. That means you, Elizabeth Edwards! As tabloid readers know, the wife of John Edwards told guests assembled at a luncheon hosted by *Ladies' Home Journal* that she felt her "choices" had made her "happier" and more "joyful" than HRC. Translation: I've parked my legal career on the shelf to mind the kids, support my husband's political ambitions and tend our wonderful marriage, unlike Hillary, a bitter ambitious career woman with a philandering husband. Well, isn't that special! Isn't she the fulfilled woman of the year! Why are we talking about whether or not a woman senator who, maybe, wants to run for President is less joyful than a (former) senator's wife who, maybe, hopes to be First Lady? Nobody would dream of measuring a male presidential hopeful on the happiness scale. If they had, Abraham Lincoln would never have been elected. It is sad to think that Ms. Edwards would play the happy-homemaker card to help her lightweight husband best a woman with about ten times as much political experience. We all know Edwards did such a great job running for Vice President—the man was everywhere!—and made such a fantastic impression in his debate with Dick Cheney. Still, I might have gone for him in the 2008 primary, because every now and then he pops up out of nowhere and says poverty is bad. Now I dunno. We bitter ambitious career women have to stick together.

No sooner had Elizabeth Edwards apologized for remarks she claimed were taken totally out of context than John Spencer, HRC's Republican opponent in the Senate race, jumped in. Hillary, he told a reporter, is ugly. "You ever see a picture of her back then? Whew!" He went on, "I don't know why Bill married her." Spencer claimed she had had "millions of dollars" of plastic surgery and now "she looks good." Or maybe not: Photos of HRC looking old and tired are a Drudge Report constant. Well, to hell with you, Mr. Spencer. I've had it with the endless monitoring of women's beauty, age, weight and hotness. You've just given me another reason to vote for her. President Hillary! The anti-Paris Hilton.

Unattractive and not-so-joyful are the least of it, though. How about "cold," "flat" and "unwomanly" (*National Review's* John Podhoretz); "robotic" (the *Wall Street Journal's* Peggy Noonan) "angry" (Republican National Committee chair Ken Mehlman); a lesbian who conceived Chelsea after being raped by Bill (biographer Ed Klein); "Nurse Ratched," "a castrating female persona" (*Orlando Sentinel* columnist Kathleen Parker on *The Chris Matthews Show*); "that buck-tooth witch, Satan," "worse" than Osama bin Laden (Don Imus). Put "Hillary" into a search engine with "Lady Macbeth," "dragon lady," "ice queen," "bitch" or "hag" and up come hundreds of thousands of hits. Oooh, an ambitious woman! A woman who isn't thinking, every minute of every day, about how to make men feel big and strong! I just might vote for her to give these pathetic misogyn-



nists what for, and so might the rest of my coven.

Well, actually, they might not, if they're like Code Pink, the women's peace group, which "bird-dogs" HRC around the country because of her support for the Iraq War. When I asked Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the group, why they focused on Clinton, she said it was primarily because the senator is "important and influential" but also because of her sex: "You expect more of a woman." Zillah Eisenstein, whose essay "Hillary's War" is posted on Code Pink's listenhillary.org, wrote me in an e-mail, "Yes,

it is because she's female." It's as if Code Pink were some kind of ladies' auxiliary to the antiwar movement.

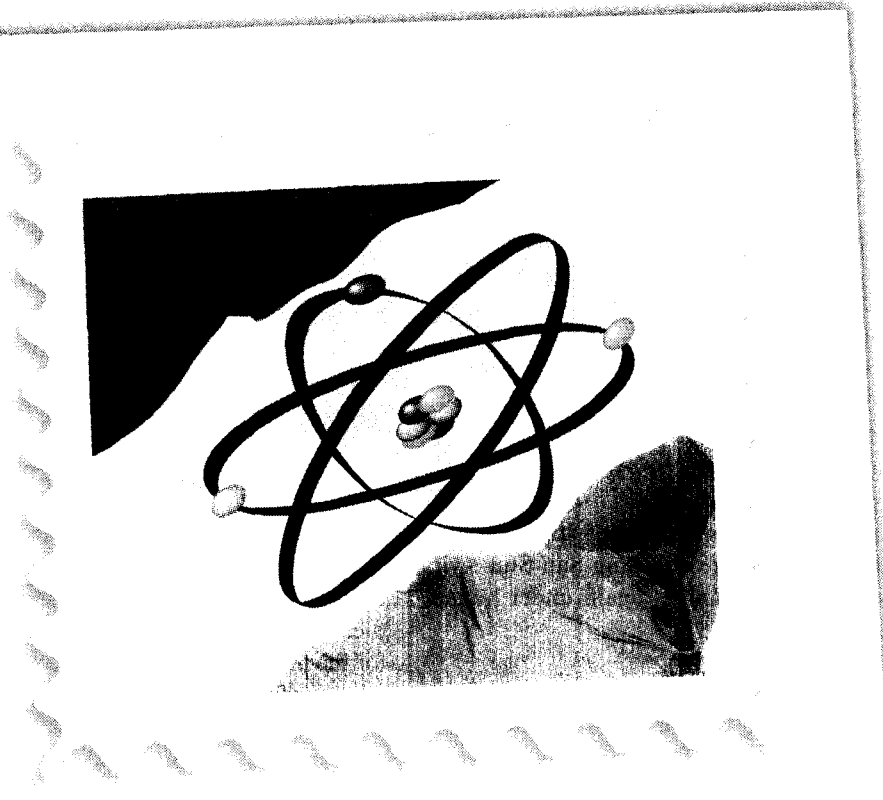
In her essay Eisenstein argues that HRC is a "female decoy" whose election would harm women because it would put a pink pseudo-feminist gloss on militarism and neoliberalism. There's something in this, but it comes close to holding Senator Clinton's femaleness against her: Logically, a man with the same positions would be less bad, because he couldn't use feminism (or female stereotypes of caring and nurturing) to disguise them. But since anyone with a realistic hope of becoming President will necessarily have made all sorts of unsavory bargains with the status quo, this amounts to saying we'll never have a woman in the White House. We'll continue on as now: "expecting more" of women and tacitly expecting less of men.

Well, count me out. The contemporary women's movement is almost forty years old, and after all that time exactly one woman has managed to reach the point where she can make a credible run for the White House. And I don't see another one around the corner, do you? Polls consistently show the castrating satanic robot way ahead of her potential primary rivals. In general election match-ups she trumps every Republican but Rudy Giuliani and John McCain. Maybe Barack Obama will alter the dynamics, which would be amusing, since I'll bet few of his fans can name even three positions he holds. But right now, if HRC were a man, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. But then, if she were a man, she wouldn't be almost universally perceived as unelectable.

I'm not saying I'd vote for Hillary Clinton in the primary—although by 2008 I expect she'll have come around on the war. I'd like a leftier candidate. But I want respect for women—and power is what gets you that. "It's natural," Medea Benjamin told me, "to want the people who are like you to be especially good." Actually, the history of politics in America demonstrates the opposite: Suppressed ethnicities and communities have put up with everything from drunkenness to corruption to outright criminality in their politicians, as long as those politicians delivered—even just a little—back home. Maybe women should forget about being angels and start being more like Italians, Irish or blacks. Let me put it this way: Any candidate who wants me to vote for him instead of her had better have a whole long list of reasons, beginning with what he will do for women that Hillary Clinton wouldn't do. ■

LETTERS FROM IRAN

SCOTT RITTER NEGAR AZIMI



The Case for Engagement

SCOTT RITTER

The distance between the northern suburbs of the Iranian capital of Tehran and the nuclear enrichment facility of Natanz is roughly 180 miles. What transpires on the ground between these two geographical points has seized the attention of the international community, and in particular the government of the United States, as the world wrestles with how best to respond to the issues surrounding Iran's decision to pursue indigenous enrichment of uranium in defiance of the United Nations Security Council's resolution demanding that all such activity cease.

I recently returned from a trip to Iran, where over the course of a week I made the journey from the northern suburbs of Tehran to the gates of the Natanz enrichment facility, and in doing so had my eyes opened. The Iran that I witnessed was far removed from the one caricatured in the US media. I left with the frustrating realization that, as had been the case with Iraq, America was stumbling toward a conflict, blinded by the prejudice and fear born of our collective ignorance.

The first thing that becomes apparent upon arrival in Tehran is that Iran is nothing like Iraq. I spent more than seven years in Iraq and know firsthand what a totalitarian dictatorship looks and acts like. Iran is not such a nation. Once I cleared passport

control, I was thrust into a vibrant society that operates free of an oppressive security apparatus such as the one that dominated Iraqi daily life in the time of Saddam Hussein. This does not mean there is no internal security apparatus in Iran—far from it. A visit to the cable cars operating in the mountains north of Tehran puts you next to a major communications station of the ministry, where cellphone conversations can be monitored using advanced software procured from the United States. Iran has a functioning domestic security apparatus, but it most definitely is not an all-seeing, all-controlling police state, any more than the United States is in the post-9/11 era, when the FBI and the National Security Agency use similar software to selectively monitor the conversations of American citizens.

Iran is certainly not an open society that operates on a par with the West. I recently had the honor of spending some time with Shirin Ebadi, who was awarded the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, and have heard her account of the intense repression meted out to those who challenge the political system. The theocrats who govern in Tehran have a history of shutting down media that are not obedient to the state, and the Iranian prison system is notorious for the jailing, beating and even execution of those who dare to protest publicly the rule of the mullahs.

In spite of these abuses of human rights and civil liberties, Iran is not a closed society. There is a ban on satellite television dishes, but many Iranians get their news from the BBC, CNN and other international television services simply by flouting the rules, which seem not to be too widely enforced. Some, like the Revolutionary Guards I became acquainted with, disguise their dish as a flower planter. The government has tried to censor the Internet, and has targeted online journalists and blocked thousands of websites. But the Internet is heavily used by Iranians, who continue to find ways to evade government controls. And cellphones are as ubiquitous as they are here in the West.

The point is that while the Iranian government often cracks down on organized public displays of dissent, the free flow of information that is vital to any dynamic society exists despite the efforts of the government to contain or control it. Ebadi is permitted to travel abroad, speaking and publishing words harshly critical of the Iranian theocracy. She has been harassed by the government but still operates freely, unlike her fellow Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Peace Prize in 1991 and is again under house arrest in Myanmar.

While Ahmadinejad plays to the street with his rhetoric, the true authority, Khamenei, has been navigating a path of moderation.

During my visit to the northern suburbs of Tehran, I was struck by the presence of wealth. Many ideologues in the United States, including those who currently occupy the corridors of power in Washington, conclude that this segment of society not only awaits US intervention to overthrow the regime but would actually cooperate with and facilitate any such effort. There is certainly a circle of Iranian secular intellectuals who chafe under Islamic law. Many of them are drawn from the ranks of the "old rich," those who made their fortunes during the time of the Shah and who yearn for the return of a Westernized, secular society. In conversation, these intellectuals often speculate about the possibility of US intervention, but more and more the hope of such liberation has been tempered by the ever-deepening disaster in Iraq. While most Iranians welcomed the elimination of Saddam, the horrors inflicted and unleashed by US military forces next door have left many of the old rich in Tehran with the realization that the dream of American intervention may turn into a nightmare. My trip convinced me that support for US intervention does not exist to any significant degree but rather resides solely in the minds of those in the West who have had their impressions of Iran shaped by pro-Shah expatriates who have been absent from the country for more than a quarter-century.

Iran today is a fully functioning capitalist society, and in addition to the old rich, there is a larger population of wealthy Iranians who made their fortunes after the Islamic revolution and who owe their ability to sustain their wealth to the continued

governance of the Islamic Republic. Likewise, those in the West who believe that the youth of Iran (more than two-thirds of the population today is under 30) share the same aspirations as the Western-oriented moneyed class will be disappointed. Those under 30 have no memory of the Iran that existed pre-theocracy and seem more willing to support a moderating change from within than a drastic change imposed from without.

The vast majority of Tehran's citizens are working- and lower middle class. These people reside in the urban sprawl of southern Tehran, where out-of-control population growth strains the resources of municipal government and the Islamic Republic as a whole. The province of Tehran has expanded from 6.8 million people a decade ago to a current official count of 10.5 million; the actual population may be closer to 12 million, with more arriving every day. Unemployment is rampant (the official figure for the country is 12.4 percent, but it's probably closer to 20 percent), and there is a growing level of dissatisfaction that has manifested itself politically in recent years.

The political center of Iran used to rest in northern Tehran. However, the 2005 presidential election saw a dramatic shift to the southern neighborhoods, whose voters helped elect one of their own, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Western media have for the most part depicted his victory as evidence of a resurgent religious fundamentalism, but anyone who walks the streets of southern Tehran (where most Western journalists are loath to wander) and visits the workshops and markets will find a much more nuanced reality. In the motorcycle repair shop I walked into I found the owner and customers evenly divided between Ahmadinejad and his principal rival, former President Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani actually won the most votes in the first round, but in the runoff Ahmadinejad shocked everyone by bringing over to his conservative platform the supporters of the reformist candidates. The key factor in his stunning victory was not religious fundamentalism but widespread disillusionment over the state of the economy, coupled with charges of nepotism and corruption surrounding Rafsanjani. Ahmadinejad was, more than anything, a reform candidate. This is what swept him into office, and it is on this issue that he continues to be judged today, with decidedly mixed results, by the people of Iran.

For all the attention the Western media give to Ahmadinejad's foreign policy pronouncements, the reality is that his effective influence is limited to domestic issues. The citizens of Tehran I spoke with, from every walk of life, understood this and were genuinely perplexed as to why we in the West treat Ahmadinejad as if he were a genuine head of state. "The man has no real power," a former Revolutionary Guard member told me. "The true power in Iran resides with the Supreme Leader." The real authority is indeed the Ayatollah Sayeed Ali Khamenei, successor to the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

According to the Iranian Constitution, the Supreme Leader has absolute authority over all matters pertaining to national security, including the armed forces, the police and the Revolutionary Guard. Only the Supreme Leader can declare war. In this regard, all aspects of Iran's nuclear program are con-

Scott Ritter, a former Marine intelligence officer, served as a chief weapons inspector for the United Nations in Iraq from 1991 to 1998. He is the author, most recently, of Target Iran: The Truth About the White House's Plans for Regime Change (Nation Books).

We Demand the Immediate Freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal, an Innocent Man.

Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeal is now on the "fast track" in the federal appeals court and the state is determined to carry out his execution.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an innocent man. A former Black Panther Party spokesman, supporter of the MOVE organization and award-winning journalist known as the "voice of the voiceless," Mumia was framed up in 1982 on false charges of killing a Philadelphia police officer. Sentenced to death based on his political history and beliefs, Mumia has spent 24 years on death row for a crime he did not commit. The frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal shows what the death penalty is all about. It is a legacy of chattel slavery and a barbaric outrage, it is the lynch rope made legal.

The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal exemplifies the race and class bias of the U.S. justice system against workers, black people, the poor and all the oppressed. The notorious trial judge, Albert Sabo was overheard at the time promising, "I'm going to help them fry the n---r." Racist jury-rigging, false testimony coerced through police threats, and prosecutorial cover-up were the basis for Mumia's conviction. Both the Pennsylvania state courts and the federal courts have refused to consider the reams of documented evidence that prove Mumia's innocence. Foremost is the sworn confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, shot and killed the police officer, and that Mumia had nothing to do with the shooting.

We stand with the millions around the world—workers, students, death penalty abolitionists, fighters for black rights and immigrant rights, socialists—who have taken up the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal now!



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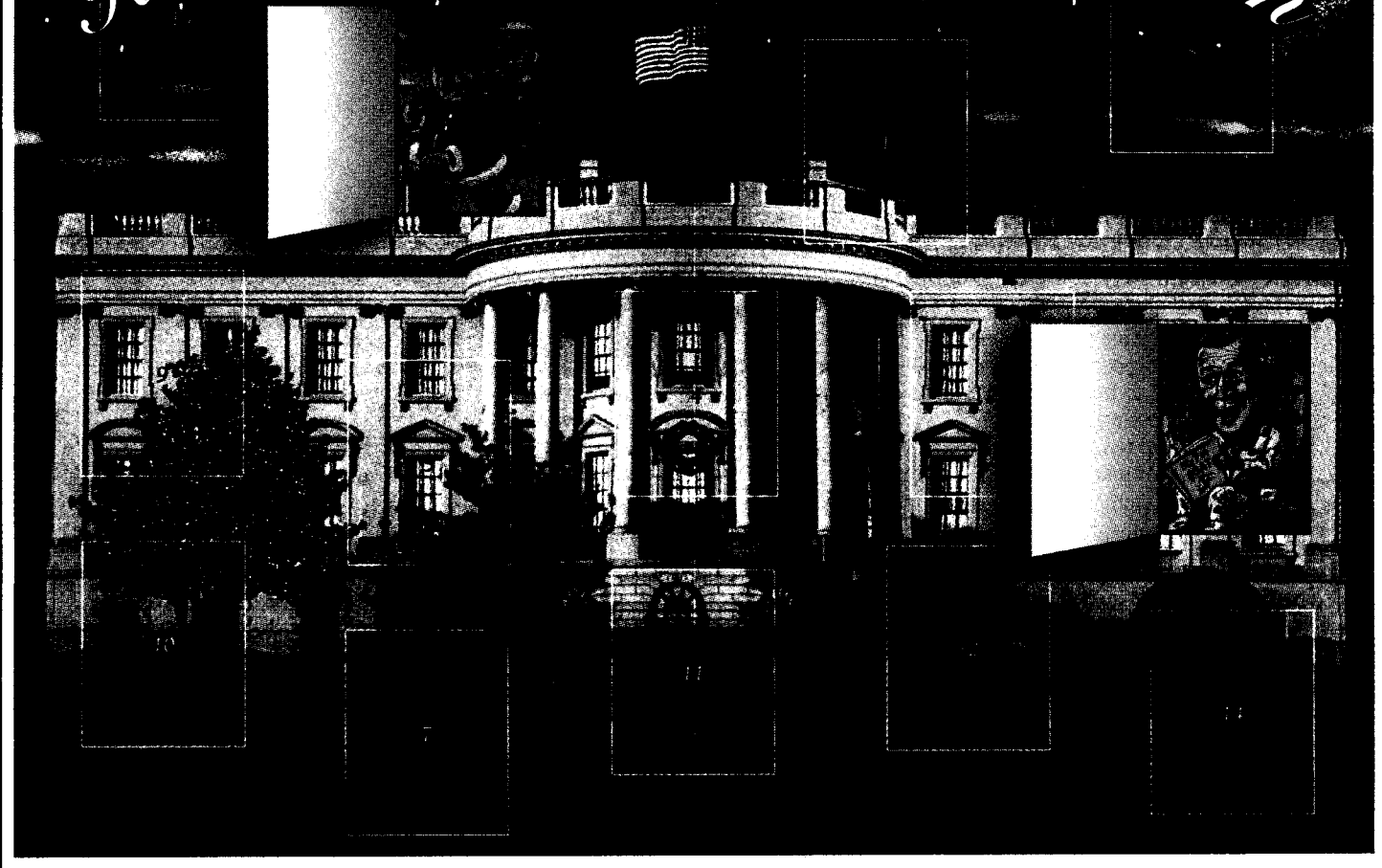
This statement was initiated by the Partisan Defense Committee. Partial list. For full list of signatories, visit www.partisandefense.org.

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trolled by Khamenei, and Ahmadinejad has no bearing on the issue. Curiously, while the Western media have replayed Ahmadinejad's anti-Israel statements repeatedly, very little attention has been paid to the Supreme Leader's pronouncement—in the form of a fatwa, or religious edict—that Iran rejects outright the acquisition of nuclear weapons, or to the efforts made by the Supreme Leader in 2003 to reach an accommodation with the United States that offered peace with Israel. While Ahmadinejad plays to the Iranian street with his inflammatory rhetoric, the true authority in Iran has been attempting to navigate a path of moderation.

The Supreme Leader's powers are impressive, but they are not absolute. Iran has a system of checks and balances that is played out through two primary bodies: the Guardian Council and the Expediency Council. Until recently the Guardian Council had absolute veto power over parliamentary legislation and was unchecked in the exercise of its oversight responsibilities. However, in 1997 Khamenei beefed up the role

and responsibility of the Expediency Council, and it was further strengthened last year; now the decisions of the Guardian Council, if challenged by the Iranian Parliament, can be overturned by the Expediency Council. The Guardian Council is still a dauntingly authoritative body, especially when one considers that the Supreme Leader has the power to appoint half its members (and all of the Expediency Council's). Iran, after all, remains an Islamic republic, which means that the political pulse is generated not in Tehran but some fifty-five miles to the south, in the holy city of Qom.

It is in Qom where many of the religious figures on the two councils reside. They teach at religious schools and have developed their own followings, comprising religious, civil and military officials who have an enormous effect on day-to-day policy. Qom is a very conservative city, and the religious figures who study there reflect this. However, this conservatism does not directly translate into the embrace of strict religious fundamentalism. There is a growing recognition among the ayatollahs who serve on the councils of the need to seek compromise on matters of religion not only to dilute internal dissent but also to better tend to the needs of the country. The greatest reform pressure on these figures comes not from religious students but rather from the traditional watchdog of the Islamic Republic, the Revolutionary Guard.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps remains very much an enigmatic entity to most Western observers. Born from the tumult of the revolution that swept the Shah from power in 1979, the Revolutionary Guard was the primary defender of the Islamic Republic during its infancy, serving as the country's first line of defense after the 1980 Iraqi invasion and against anti-regime forces, in particular the guerrillas of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or People's Mujahedeen (MEK). The Revolutionary Guard also served as defender of the Shiite faith abroad, playing a pivotal role in the formation of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion.

Many of the actions of the guard have been cited by the

United States as evidence that Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism. The guard members I spoke with reject this characterization. "We did some pretty terrible things in our early years, but we were fighting for our national survival," one veteran member told me. "The MEK was waging a war in our cities, ambushing our forces, assassinating our politicians and killing our citizens with car bombs. We had to crush them, either in Iran or out. But if we kill an MEK operative in France or Germany, we become terrorists. If America kills an Al Qaeda operative in another country, you are counterterrorists. This makes no sense. We have never targeted or attacked Americans or American interests. We condemned the 9/11 attacks as a crime against Islam and a crime against humanity. And yet we are reviled as terrorists, or even worse, co-conspirators with Al Qaeda. Doesn't America understand that we oppose Al Qaeda and all it stands for? Do you not

*Doesn't America understand that we oppose
Al Qaeda and all it stands for?*

—Iranian Revolutionary Guard veteran

know that the teachings of Sunni Wahhabism are anathema to the teachings of the Shia faith?"

In our haste to lash out at those who attacked us on

September 11, 2001, we forget that Iran not only condemned the attacks, as did its Hezbollah allies in Lebanon, but that it nearly fought a war against Afghanistan's Taliban and their Al Qaeda allies in the late 1990s. There is no greater potential ally in the struggle against Sunni extremism than Shiite Iran, a point made over and over by everyone I talked to, especially those affiliated with the Revolutionary Guard. As one veteran told me, "Iraq is our neighbor, and of course we have a vested interest in its stability. We fought an eight-year war with Iraq, so we understand the realities of that country. We are very glad the United States got rid of Saddam. But now what America is doing only makes the region more insecure. We could help America in Iraq if only they would let us."

Moving south from Qom, along modern highways interspersed with rest stops that would meet with the approval of any traveler on the New York State Thruway, I was struck by the long lines of cars at gas stations. For all its oil wealth, Iran has an energy crisis. With its economy focused on the cash business of oil export, little attention has been paid to the needs of the domestic consumer. Iran is woefully lacking in domestic refining capacity, so much so that it spends billions every year importing gasoline at world market prices, which it then discounts so that the Iranian consumer pays only some 40 cents a gallon. This makes no economic sense, but Iran's oil is already fully leveraged in the export market. With reserves shrinking and new discoveries waning, Iran faces a serious energy crisis in the coming decades unless alternative sources are developed.

Some 180 miles south of Tehran lies the Natanz nuclear enrichment facility. Tucked away on the side of the road, surrounded by a makeshift berm and numerous antiaircraft artillery emplacements, the facility has the outward appearance of something dark and ominous. But the secrets concerning what lies within are well-known to the world as a result of inspections carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency. What the inspectors say is crystal clear: There is no evidence that Iran

is pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Furthermore, the enrichment program is plagued with technical problems that prevent any rapid progress. There is no imminent nuclear weapons threat from Iran, which hasn't mastered the technologies and methodologies of enrichment needed to sustain a nuclear energy program, let alone a nuclear weapons effort.

The Bush Administration speaks of the need to move quickly on the issue of Iran's nuclear ambition and to roll back the forces of terror represented by the Islamic Republic. The repeated and explicit demand of the Administration is for regime change, as evidenced in the March 2006 "National Security Strategy of the United States," where Iran is named repeatedly as the number-one threat to the United States. The alleged Iranian threat espoused by Bush is based on fear, and arises from a combination of ignorance and ideological inflexibility. The path that the United States is currently embarked on regarding Iran is a path that will lead to war. (Indeed, there are numerous unconfirmed reports that the United States has already begun covert military operations inside Iran, including overflights by pilotless drones and recruitment and training of MEK, Kurdish and Azeri guerrillas.) Such a course of action would make even the historic blunder of the Iraq invasion pale by comparison. When we talk of war, we must never forget that we are talking about the lives of the men and women who serve us in the armed forces. We have a duty and responsibility to insure that all options short of war are exhausted before any decision to enter into conflict is made. On the issue of Iran, the United States

hasn't even come close to exhausting the available options.

The solution to this problem is clear. The most logical course would be to put Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on a flight to Tehran, where she could negotiate directly with the principal players on the Iranian side, including Supreme Leader Khamenei. If Administration officials actually engaged with the Iranians, they would have an eye-opening experience. Of course, Rice would need to come with a revamped US policy, one that rejects regime change, provides security guarantees for Iran as it is currently governed and would be willing to recognize Iran's legitimate right to enrich uranium under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (although under stringent UN inspections, and perhaps limited to the operation of a single 164-centrifuge cascade).

Rice would undoubtedly be surprised at the degree of moderation (and pro-American sentiment) that exists in Iran today. She might also be shocked to find out that the Iranians are more than ready to sit down with the United States and work out a program for stability in Iraq, as well as a reduction of tensions between Israel and Hezbollah. In addition to significantly reducing the risk of a disastrous conflict, such a visit would do more to encourage moderation and peace in the region than any amount of saber-rattling could ever hope to accomplish. And it would do more to help America prevail in the so-called Global War on Terror than any war plan the Pentagon could assemble. In the end, that is what defines good policy—something sadly lacking in Washington today. ■

Letter From Iran

by Negar Azimi

WHAT'S LEFT OF REFORM

One steamy hot Tehran afternoon late this past spring, Ahmad Saei received a letter that struck him as especially odd. A professor of law and international relations at Tehran University, he was used to receiving a daily notice addressing mundane school matters—religious holidays, ceremonies, talks on campus. That day's mail, however, was different. Written on behalf of the university administration, the note announced that the university would be sorry to lose four longtime professors to retirement as of the fall. He scanned down, surprised to see that the charismatic head of the faculty of law and political science—of which he was a member—was on the list. Just below that, he saw his own name—first, middle, last. He took a long sip of his black tea, shut off his computer and walked to his first lecture of the day.

Saei's "retirement" took almost everyone by surprise. He had been a professor at Tehran University since the late 1970s, when this and other campuses throughout the country were

caught up in heady political storms that ended in a revolution. He had long considered himself among the revolutionaries; like thousands of other young people of his generation, he had agitated for the overthrow of the US-backed Pahlavi monarchy. But something had changed. A self-described reformist, Saei does not seem to share the vision of the new set of men who have been running the country since last year's presidential election. "They want to make the university *yek dast* [made of 'one hand']," he told me of the country's leadership. "But it will take a second revolution to do that."

One year into office, a second revolution may not be that far removed from what Iran's new leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has in mind. A man of now famously humble origins who rose from simple foot soldier of the Revolutionary Guard to become mayor of Tehran, the president has made no secret of his plans to return his country to what he has obliquely referred to as "true Islam." Ahmadinejad's stance is anti-corruption, anti-decadence, vehemently anti-imperial. He fancies himself a rock star of the people (he has been known to dive into adoring crowds), a king of the photo-op, a sort of Gamal Abdel Nasser

Negar Azimi is senior editor of Bidoun, an arts and culture magazine based in New York.

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of the Iranian street. Speaking to a rapt group of university students during the first week of September, the new president blithely equated secular education with the evils of colonialism, continuing, "Students should shout at the president and ask why liberal and secular university lecturers are present in the universities." Ahmadinejad's comments may augur grim changes. Dozens of professors have already been sent packing. And as the new academic year begins, there are rumors that many more will soon follow.

At Tehran University, the dismissal of the professors inspired unrest. On the heels of the first set of retirements last spring, students organized a sit-in that devolved into two days of demonstrations, spilling out of the faculty of law and into the courtyard, and continuing into the night at the university dormitories some miles away. At the stark, military-style dorms, the demonstrators appropriated sundry causes beyond the fate of the professors—from the publication of a cartoon some weeks before that had offended Iran's ethnic Azeris, a Turkic-speaking people who make up a quarter of the population, to living conditions in the university dorms and more general political gripes. There, students clashed with plainclothes security as well as police, ending in injuries and arrests. For some, this seemed an eerie throwback to 1999's violent clashes at the same site over the closure of a number of reformist newspapers, in what were the most significant student protests in Iran's recent history.

Elaheh, a student at the university, counts herself among a small group of self-proclaimed Marxists on campus. She brushed by me one day at the faculty of law, just one week after the biggest of the demonstrations. A busted, splintery door in the faculty's main hall marked the site where rioting had poured out of this space. "The traditional culture of revolt here has been the left. Our parents were revolutionaries in 1979; now we're carrying on the fight they started," she explained.

For some students frustrated by the failure of the reformists and the rise of a president bent on turning back the clock, the left has a distinct appeal. The reformists spoke of human rights and democracy, quoted Habermas and Hegel, and had a committed following among the country's intellectuals. Out of sync with most Iranians' daily realities, their lofty talk didn't resonate with people more concerned about making ends meet—hence the election of Ahmadinejad, a plain-speaking candidate whose motto was social justice.

The left has a significant history in this country—from the short-lived reign of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, who dared to nationalize Iranian oil in 1951, thereby inspiring a coup backed by Iran's US and British patrons, to Ali Shariati, one of the intellectual architects of the 1979 revolution who lent a socialist reading to Shiism. Come 2006, Che Guevara caps are fashionable in university halls, and (rough) translations of Adorno and Marx abound. Today's fledgling left has its own publications, too; printed on inexpensive newsprint, their covers boast hammers, sickles, factory icons. Some of

them have an explicit orientation targeting the working classes. The bolder among them were vocal last winter when a transportation strike climaxed in the closing of Tehran's bus drivers' syndicate. On International Workers' Day this year, these student groups, along with a coalition of women's rights activists, gathered in solidarity with the striking workers.

But these movements—students, advocates of workers' rights, people agitating for women's rights, even the reformist press—remain small, fractured, isolated. The students' knowledge of the left's origins and legacy is spotty. The bus drivers have not been able to mobilize since their syndicate was closed and their leader imprisoned. And little seems off-limits to the machinery of Ahmadinejad's government; in August Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi sent a letter to the international community revealing that her organization, the Tehran-based

Defenders of Human Rights Center, stood to be shut down by the Interior Ministry—purportedly for not having the proper permit. In early September, *Shargh*, perhaps

the last reformist newspaper still standing, was forced to close its doors.

Amid modest bouts of activism, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the American foreign policy she orchestrates have all but called upon Iranians to rise up against their regime. A new Office of Iranian Affairs at the State Department has taken the place of the portentously named Office of Special Plans, while this past summer, in response to a request from Rice, Congress appropriated \$66 million to bolster the prospects for democracy in Iran—expanding satellite broadcasts, aiding political dissidents as well as Iranian organizations inside the country and out. Seemingly harmless enough, the initiative has in fact made life even harder for some members of Iran's embattled civil society.

"We're not going to play host to colored revolutions here," Habib, a student at Allameh Tabatabai University told me one day in reference to the transitions that have overtaken the likes of Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. "It will be our blood that spills red the second we are linked to the Americans."

The mere prospect of being linked to foreigners, especially Americans, is an uncomfortable one. The April arrest of philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo on charges of colluding with the United States to carry out a "velvet revolution"—a reference to the Czechoslovakian experience of 1989—is a testament to the changed terrain. Jahanbegloo, while not politically active, had hosted such foreign intellectuals as Richard Rorty, Timothy Garton Ash and Antonio Negri in Tehran in recent years. The fact that he was once a fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy certainly did not help his case.

Almost across the board, Iranians resist the prospect of being helped by "the American money." The dangling cash has become a darkly comic subject as, for many, perhaps the only government they dislike more than their own is an American one they associate with double standards and overzealous meddling that goes back more than a century, reaching deep

For some students frustrated by the failure of the reformists and the rise of Ahmadinejad, the left has a distinct appeal.

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into their psyches. Complicating matters, a number of prominent American conservatives have become, you could say, unlikely champions for Iranian freedom—from columnist Andrew Sullivan, who has tried to bring attention to the fate of the country's homosexuals, to the American Enterprise Institute's Michael Ledeen, who has lamented Iran's treatment of its ethnic minorities. Both are vocal advocates of regime change.

Amin, a 50-something dealer in secondhand foreign-language books in Tehran, explained his sentiment: "Am I unhappy? Yes. But do I want American-style modernity? No. Their democracy is like fast food, parachuted in by people who know nothing about us," he told me one day as students mined his cramped space for books in English.

This past spring, some signs indicated that the Bush Administration was in the midst of developing military plans to take out the Tehran regime, reported most prominently by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*. And in recent weeks this magazine and *Time* have reported that a "prepare to deploy" order was issued to US warships, dispatching them to the Persian Gulf to hover just off Iran's western coast.

But despite an endless stream of US admonishments and military muscle-flexing, Ahmadinejad and his camp have never seemed quite so smug. In September the Iranian president was in New York for the opening meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. There, he bemoaned the fate of occupied peoples the world over, warned of the dangers of using the UN as a tool for "threat and coercion" and finally defended his country's right to develop nuclear energy. At the Council on Foreign Relations he worked a room packed with scholars and dignitaries, answering every question with one of his own, engaging in a dizzying game of circumlocution that left many in the audience exasperated. In just about all his public addresses, there is a distinct triumphalism in tone, an unnerving self-confidence. And why not? Iran holds all the right cards in neighboring Shiite-dominated Iraq, oil prices continue to soar, the Bush doctrine of magical transformation in the region is sputtering and the Tehran regime is basking in the gains of what has been roundly deemed a Hezbollah victory over Israel in Lebanon (Iran is Hezbollah's greatest backer, though the extent and nature of that backing is a subject of contention). It thus comes as little surprise that Ahmadinejad denied the UN access to key sites in late August, after it demanded a freeze on the country's uranium enrichment program. Though it seems likely that Iran will face some form of sanction, the Iranians, insisting that the enrichment is for peaceful purposes, seem hardly to care.

And so as Iran and the United States trade insults, and the press engages in a sort of nuclear fetishism, it is members of Iran's civil society—women's rights activists, educators, student leaders—who may have to pay the greatest cost. Hemmed in by their own state, they are also disenchanted by the anti-regime mantras of a largely Los Angeles-based opposition that spans

everything from exiled leftists to monarchists to a humdrum former monarch's son who has written a pocket guide to democracy (he announces that he will come back as king only if the people will it). Add the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq to the mix—a bizarre, cultlike socialist-Islamist outfit that is perhaps best known for inspiring self-immolation among some of its most devoted members—and you see that the alternatives are few. The government, in turn, announces that you are either on our team or theirs. In this picture, anything in between gets all but squeezed out.

As Iran and the US trade insults, and the press engages in a sort of nuclear fetishism, Iran's civil society may pay the greatest cost.

In early June I walked into a raucous meeting of a women's group in South Tehran. Seated around a tiny table, the women were mostly in their 20s. I had interrupted an argument in progress; they were in the midst of planning a demonstration to bring attention to the place of women in the country's revolutionary Constitution of 1979, though they were not settled as to the exact form their demands would take. Some thought it was their duty to call for a referendum on the Constitution at large. Others seemed to find this unwise, unrealistic at best, and opted instead to focus on specific aspects of the Constitution that were unfriendly to women—such as laws governing custody or marriage. These were things, argued one of them, that women of all social classes could relate to.

I asked what was perhaps an obvious question—or at least the question everyone has tended to ask since the last election: Had their work changed at all in the past year? Bitā, a young leftist among the assembled, answered me with an analogy:

"We are back to the time of the revolution. America is once again the devil. This is pounded into us. And so, like the early years after the revolution, being a feminist—what we do—is targeted as something foreign, American, not from here. Even working at an NGO means you are not loyal, that you're working for foreigners and you are against your own country."

Less than three months before, on March 8, International Women's Day, this group was among hundreds roughed up in a downtown park. As one woman read the organizers' manifesto, she and others encountered electric batons and tear gas wielded by Revolutionary Guards, members of the Basij (a paramilitary branch of the guards) and plainclothes vigilantes. Ahmadinejad's second revolution seemed to be taking form.

"We weren't surprised," Leila, among the organizers of the Women's Day event, told me about the attack. "And we're prepared to take it again."

Less than two weeks later, I woke to receive e-mails and text messages announcing that a downtown demonstration had been broken up even before it had the chance to begin. The young women I had just sat with were among at least seventy rounded up and held at various locations throughout the city. I thought of Leila's marked nonchalance and wondered if I was in fact the only one taken aback by the news. They seemed to have known that for their generation, many of them too young to remember the revolution their parents once fought for, the battle has only just begun. ■

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The Gutting of the Civil Service

DAN ZEGART

On September 1, 2004, a patient with type O blood died at a hospital and blood bank in Ponce, Puerto Rico, after being mistakenly given two units of type A blood. Upon investigation, Food and Drug Administration inspectors discovered that before the fatal accident, Hospital Damas had come close to killing two other patients under similar circumstances. Even afterward, Hospital Damas still failed to verify critical medical data or properly train its employees.

Five months later the FDA's San Juan district office recommended that the agency issue a warning letter, which is supposed to be a company's last chance to eliminate a hazard before being sued or having its product seized. But despite abundant evidence that patients at Hospital Damas were in danger, even this relatively minor enforcement action—routine in previous administrations—was never carried out. Instead, the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, which oversees blood banks, claimed there was no evidence of systemic problems.

The decision was far from surprising. Over the past five years warning letters have become an endangered species at the FDA. According to a recent report by Representative Henry Waxman, the number of such letters issued under Bush-appointed FDA chief counsel Dan Troy plummeted from 1,154 in 2000 to 535 in 2005. Seizures of mislabeled, defective or dangerous products, another key measure of enforcement activity, dipped 44 percent. Waxman's investigators found a disturbing pattern of laissez-faire managers overruling field agents trying to discipline wrongdoers—even when deaths had resulted.

The changes at the FDA are but one result of an unprecedented attempt by the Bush team to extend direct political control deep into operational areas throughout the executive bureaucracy, especially at agencies where the Administration has strong policy interests such as the FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Justice Department and the Interior Department. Troy, who essentially ran the nation's most important consumer protection agency during much of Bush's first term, a time when the office of commissioner was either vacant or in turmoil, is typical of those appointed by the White House to oversee this effort. He had spent his previous career suing the FDA on behalf of extremist think tanks like the Washington Legal Foundation and corporate clients like Brown & Williamson Tobacco, which successfully blocked the FDA's historic attempt to regulate cigarettes.

Thanks to the anti-regulatory course set by Troy and his counterparts at other agencies, many longtime bureaucrats have simply quit. But what is actually happening is more complex and



far-reaching than mere brain drain. More accurately, the executive branch is undergoing a brain transplant. An entire culture of civil service professionals loyal to their agency's mission is being systematically replaced with a conservative cadre accountable to the White House. While every President appoints his own "political" to run the departments, the Bush team has broken new ground, attempting to realign the executive branch permanently by junking a 100-year-old system of merit-based hiring for

career bureaucrats.

While the embedding of political in career jobs did not originate with Bush, the scale and coordination with which it is being done under this Administration seem unprecedented, according to more than fifty current and former government officials interviewed during an eight-month-long *Nation* investigation. "They've put people in charge of many offices who simply don't believe in the mission of the office," said William Yeomans, a twenty-four-year veteran of the Justice Department's civil rights division who quit last year after being inexplicably transferred to the criminal unit. "And they are there to insure that those offices will never return to carrying out the policies or enforcing the law in the way that they used to. And they're going to do that by changing the people who are in the bureaucracy."

Joe Rich, a lawyer who quit as chief of the voting section of the civil rights division of the DOJ in April 2005, concurs. "Obviously during the Reagan years you were going to have a very different philosophy," he said. "But you didn't have that sense that it was kind of raw politics, that everything they were doing was trying to help the party."

At the FDA, the story is much the same. Many longtime staffers, known within the bureaucracy as "careers" to distinguish them from "politicals" like Troy, resisted the agency's anti-consumer tilt but could do little about it. "When career people get in a fight with a political, it's not a fair fight," said William Hubbard, who retired as associate commissioner for policy and planning in spring 2005 after more than twenty-five years at the agency. Former FDA officials estimate that between fifty and a hundred senior managers have quit, retired or been demoted, fired or transferred over the past five years, although no one knows the precise number, and the agency refused to provide any figures or comment for this article. These numbers, though small at an agency with 10,000 employees, have had an outsized impact because they represent the cream of the FDA's upper echelon, a group with much of the agency's accumulated know-how.

The result of the mass departures has been rudderless, demoralized agencies bleeding institutional memory. "What we've seen is an increase in what you might call the misery index," said Paul Light, an expert on the federal bureaucracy at the Brookings Institution. "Senior executives who've worked an entire lifetime in government toward the faithful execution of a given law like

Dan Zegart is the author of Civil Warriors: The Legal Siege on the Tobacco Industry and Your Father's Voice: Letters for Emmy About Life With Jeremy—and Without Him After 9/11. Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.

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Clean Air or Clean Water just get so frustrated with the meddling that they say, 'I'm eligible for retirement, I've had enough of this, I want out.'" In a prepared statement, White House spokeswoman Emily Lawrimore denied any attempt to politicize the career workforce: "President Bush has instructed members of his Cabinet to hire men and women of the greatest ability and highest ethical and professional integrity. In his Administration federal employees are selected by their professional abilities, not their personal politics."

Not Invited

Everywhere Dan Troy and his counterparts have gone, three things have happened. First, long-serving careers have been shunted aside, excluded not only from decision-making, but even from providing meaningful input. The EPA's Eric Schaeffer remembered realizing this while arguing for more stringent air-emissions standards for pollution-producing factory farms. "It was the experience of having done a lot of work laying data out and numbers and making an argument about the law, and not having anything come back on the other side. I spent all those years logrolling and compromising, like other bureaucrats, so I was used to that. It's not like that was the process. It was just basically, 'We're not going to do that,'" said Schaeffer, who quit after twelve years at the EPA.

FDA careers say that under Bush, unlike previous administrations, when FDA staff went to a meeting at the White House or to brief "the department"—meaning the higher-ups at Health and Human Services—careers were almost never invited. Former senior associate commissioner Linda Suydam recalled, "The craziest things are happening when you've got somebody like [former Commissioner Lester] Crawford and Troy, who don't know the agency all that well down there presenting positions, and then they bring 'em back and you try to figure out what you're supposed to be doing. And you have no idea what it actually means." Meetings at the FDA would nominally include career staff, but the decisions would be made afterward, at a post-meeting huddle for political only. "There was a steady erosion of influence by the career staff beginning in January of '01, and by maybe late '02 the careers were largely excluded and powerless in decision-making," said former associate commissioner Hubbard.

A second method of political control has been simply to redefine civil service jobs as political jobs, or to create new political slots. At the FDA, the post of deputy commissioner for medical and scientific affairs was created for Dr. Scott Gottlieb in July 2005. Hiring Gottlieb gave a free-market ideologue direct authority over drug review and safety. The choice of Gottlieb, who had served as an FDA staffer, was particularly infuriating to career staffers at the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research because Gottlieb, a physician in his mid-30s, had little government experience and none running a large organization. Most recently he had been editor of the *Forbes/Gottlieb Medical Technology Report*, where he advised readers on how to profit from his insider's view of the FDA. Moreover, Gottlieb came on board in the midst of the Vioxx withdrawal scandal despite his well-known view that the FDA's drug review process was too onerous.

Gottlieb has a good deal of company at other agencies. Another report by Representative Waxman found that Bush

has added 307 new political appointees to the federal payroll, a 12 percent spike that Paul Light of Brookings calls "stunning." The number of Schedule C political appointees, who don't require Congressional approval, increased 33 percent. Both categories had dropped sharply under Clinton. "The number of layers being created at the top of the federal government has increased dramatically under Bush," said Light.

But what makes this Administration unique, according to scholars and bureaucrats, is the degree of uniformity with which the Bush template has been applied across the executive branch. Out of 1.8 million federal employees, roughly 3,000 are political appointees. Those 3,000 share the upper tier of government with another 6,400 senior career executives. However, according to Light, the extraordinary degree of centralized control exercised over the entire bureaucracy has made those "3,000 feel like 10,000. They operate with a single-minded focus that makes them very present in the day-to-day operation of the agencies, all the way down to the field levels."

The third and most disturbing way the Bush Administration has consolidated its hold over the bureaucracy is the embedding of "hidden political" in career slots in the executive branch. Candidates are interviewed and selected supposedly on the basis of merit according to civil service procedures, but the real "play" is to hire a politically reliable person.

One of the last things Hubbard did as a career FDA'er was to hire Randall Lutter from the conservative American Enterprise Institute to replace Lester Breslow, who was retiring as chief economist, a civil service slot in Hubbard's policy and planning shop. "I was in the process of recruiting the person behind Breslow, when [former Commissioner Mark] McClellan called me one day and said, 'I'd like to play on filling that economist's job,'" Hubbard remembered. "So I said, 'Well, how do you want to play it?' He said, 'This guy I know, a guy named Randy Lutter.' I said, 'I know him.' And so we brought him in and talked to him and all. But it was pretty much a done deal."

Not long afterward, Hubbard left and Lutter took over his old job as assistant commissioner so that in effect, Hubbard had hired a political replacement for himself.

Loyalty Above All

Like Hubbard at the FDA, Joe Rich and others at the civil rights division of the Justice Department claim there has been a deliberate effort to replace pro-enforcement careers with Bush loyalists. Rich served for thirty-seven years under regimes as different as those of Johnson, Nixon, Reagan and Clinton. He left civil rights because of the growing chasm between career lawyers like himself, who believe in the aggressive enforcement that had been the unit's hallmark, and Bush political appointees hostile to that tradition.

By April 2005, when Rich retired, almost all the senior managers in the civil rights division—charged with enforcing laws against employment, voting and housing discrimination—were gone. In fiscal year 2005 alone, 20 percent of the division's litigators quit. Unlike those departing, the new arrivals were not necessarily graduates of elite law schools, and their résumés often failed to demonstrate any interest in attacking civil rights abuses. What they did have in common, said Rich, were depend-

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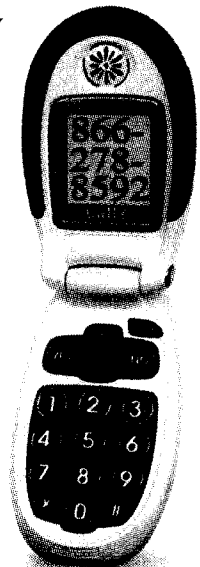
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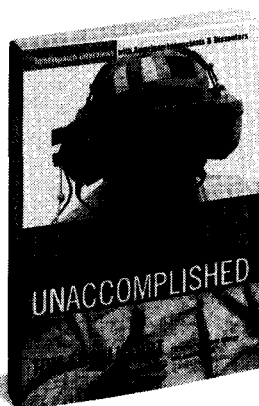
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able hard-right sympathies. And one other thing: Unlike political appointees, these civil servants will remain at DOJ if a Democratic President takes office.

Rich and other senior career lawyers soon became disillusioned with the way cases that almost certainly would have been pursued under previous administrations were being ducked, while others were abandoned or even reversed. "In all the Bush years, there wasn't one case brought on behalf of African-Americans," said Rich of his experience at the voting section. He said the biggest void was in "vote dilution" cases alleging that voting district lines were drawn to minimize the impact of minorities. So-called Section 5 and Section 2 reviews, in which the DOJ screens proposed changes to state voting laws for civil rights violations, suddenly became unabashedly anti-minority and partisan, like the 2003 opinion that the GOP's minority-hostile redistricting of Texas into a Republican stronghold was legal, and another that Arizona could require voters to produce photo IDs. Both opinions ignored contrary opinions from careers in the voting section. Both were written by Sheldon Bradshaw, a high-ranking official in the civil rights division and another ultra-conservative who in April 2005 would succeed Dan Troy as general counsel at the FDA, although he had no relevant experience with food or drug issues.

Rich, Yeomans and others noted other disturbing changes. The honors program, through which a committee of career lawyers helped recruit the finest young legal talent in the country, was replaced with a system in which the politically appointed assistant attorney general controlled hiring. "I would get a phone call that would say, 'We're going to interview X, can you come over this afternoon to join the interview?' And I haven't even seen a résumé. I'd go over for the interview and the person would be hired the next day," Rich remembered.

Like Yeomans's reassignment to the criminal division, some of the most highly regarded career lawyers in the civil rights division were abruptly shifted to other duties without explanation. Robert Libman, a highly successful attorney in the employment litigation section, quit the department not long after being involuntarily transferred to a newly created unit that defended civil rights lawsuits against the government. "You can certainly draw some conclusions about whether that was a punitive move," said Aaron Schuham, another former employment litigator at the DOJ. Disturbed by the division's change of course, Schuham joined three other disenchanted employment litigation attorneys and transferred onto the DOJ's Tobacco Litigation Team, which was prosecuting the multibillion-dollar RICO lawsuit against the cigarette makers. (All but one have since left government.)

Sharon Eubanks, then a DOJ career and director of the tobacco team, gladly hired Schuham and the other attorneys from civil rights. However, the tobacco lawsuit was far from exempt from political pressure. Eubanks worked under Assistant Attorney General Peter Keisler, one of the five founders of the Federalist Society, as well as Keisler's superior, Associate Attorney General Robert McCallum Jr., a close friend of George W. Bush at Yale and a fellow member of Skull & Bones. Eubanks reported directly to Daniel Meron, a principal deputy assistant attorney general who came from the same law firm as Keisler and had been a conservative TV

commentator during the Florida recount in 2000.

Meron, Keisler and McCallum publicly backed the suit. However, by the time the eight-month trial ended in early June 2005, they seemed worried, according to Eubanks, that her underfunded team of thirty-eight lawyers—the industry had some 300 working the case—might actually win and perhaps bankrupt the cigarette makers. The Bush White House had never supported *United States of America v. Philip Morris Inc. et al.*, which was filed under Clinton, and which Bush disparaged in his 2000 campaign. As the trial wore on, Eubanks said, the political interference increased. As closing arguments approached, McCallum tried to persuade her to scale back the government's demand for an industry-funded, twenty-five-year, \$130 billion package of smoking cessation and other anti-cigarette programs. Eubanks refused. Late on the night of June 6, 2005, with summations only hours away, McCallum pressured the team to reduce that number drastically, losing his temper and shouting, according to Eubanks, who walked out of the meeting. Twenty minutes later, another trial team member joined her in tears. "He had pieces of paper with calculations on them. And he looked at me and he said, 'Is this OK with you?' The number at that point was \$18 billion to \$20 billion over seven years," said Eubanks. "And I said, 'I'm not the guy making the decisions. You can see that.'"

The next morning, minutes before Court, McCallum sent an e-mail further shrinking the number to \$10 billion over five years, which was the figure that Stephen Brody, Eubanks's second-in-command, presented that afternoon, triggering audible gasps in the courtroom. Six months later, Eubanks took early retirement after twenty-two years at the Justice Department and six years on the tobacco suit. She left behind a perfect trial record. In August federal Judge Gladys Kessler ruled for the government in a scathing decision, which held that the cigarette industry orchestrated a campaign of deception about smoking's hazards but imposed marketing restrictions, not monetary penalties.

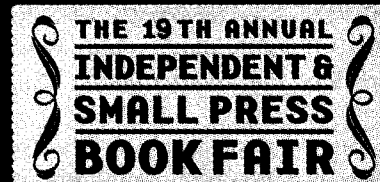
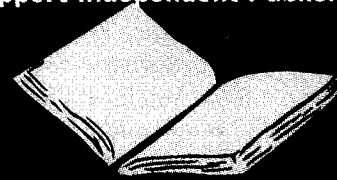
"I quit because I really wasn't representing the public interest," said Eubanks, "because when you're at the point where you have to do their bidding, then it's just time to go." After six months of unsuccessfully seeking work at Washington law firms, Eubanks took a pay cut to work for a nonprofit.

Peter Keisler was nominated for the spot on the Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit vacated by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. After his nomination stalled, Daniel Meron was given a recess appointment as general counsel at Health and Human Services, succeeding Alex Azar, a Bush loyalist who worked closely with Dan Troy in overhauling the FDA. Robert McCallum was confirmed in July as ambassador to Australia after an internal DOJ investigation cleared him, Keisler and Meron of any political motivation in changing the damage award sought by the government in the tobacco case.

No Friends in High Places

Aside from Henry Waxman, Congressional Democrats have done little to oppose Bush's politicization of the bureaucracy. "It's not sexy," commented one Congressional staffer. But the civil service unions are fighting back fiercely, since the combination of politicization and privatization threatens their very existence.

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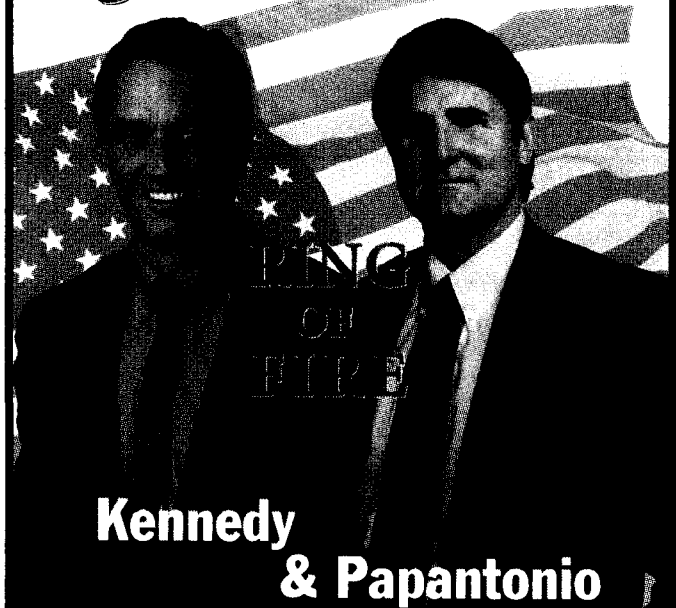
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There is broad agreement that the civil service system—particularly the cumbersome disciplinary process that makes it difficult to force poor performers out of government—needs reform. But the Bush Administration, under the cloak of reform, has worked to gut the entire system. Using the September 11 attacks as a justification, it established new personnel systems that stripped the 180,000 employees of the newly created Homeland Security Department and the 670,000 employees of the Defense Department of union protections afforded federal workers elsewhere, allowing managers broad latitude to hire and fire and to ignore merit in staffing decisions.

In addition, the Office of Personnel Management has expanded to a much larger group its “pay for performance” system, which awards or withholds performance-based pay increases, and which was first instituted among the 6,000 members of the elite senior executive service. Pay-for-performance got poor marks from many long-serving bureaucrats polled in a recent survey by the Senior Executives Association. “I would say that there’s a lot of cynicism about the fairness of the system,” said William Bransford, SEA general counsel. “And a lot of people feel that there is political pressure.”

A combination of new legislation and a new approach by the executive branch has substantially changed the rules for merit system hiring. Before, managers had to give preference to internal candidates, and their power to fire workers was carefully circumscribed. This has been replaced with “direct hiring,” which allows much more discretion. When combined with the relaxation of rules for outsourcing and privatization, political can readily engage in what is euphemistically called “workforce shaping.” “It allows tremendous discretion for isolating particular individuals and neutralizing veterans’ preference and seniority and all of those things,” said Jacqueline Simon, direc-

tor of public policy for the American Federation of Government Employees union. “They don’t have to give a reason. It’s much closer to employment at will.”

Back to the Spoils System?

The relentless GOP attack on the bureaucracy amounts to an assault on the very idea of professional government. It would alter a cornerstone belief of American governance, dating to the Pendleton Act of 1883, that it is essential to insulate public servants from partisan influence. The modern civil service was created in reaction to the endemic abuses of the spoils system that ran nineteenth-century American politics. “Political sympathy and partisan activity were...required as a condition of appointment. Fitness for office was given far less consideration and thus, the quality of public service was seriously affected,” says the Office of Personnel Management’s website, words that could apply to the Bush-era executive branch.

Richard Nixon once said that allowing his Cabinet to select a sub-Cabinet was his “first mistake.” Later, the Reaganites “went to school on Nixon and centralized the appointments process,” said public policy expert Paul Light. “Then Bush went to school on Reagan, arguing that every appointment should be centralized and carefully vetted for ideology.” This innovation may be one of the Bush Administration’s most significant legacies.

A study by Light found that compared with the eight Presidents who preceded him, George W. Bush has “one of the smallest domestic agendas in recent history,” ranking last in major domestic legislative proposals. It may well be that his most enduring domestic legacy will be a backward-looking reinvention of government. ■

LETTERS

C O N T I N U E D

(Continued From Page 2)

no communication of any kind from anyone at the *Washington Times* prior to deciding that *Human Events* would not publish Archibald’s piece.

Further spreading falsehoods, Blumenthal writes, “Just how Marian Coombs obtained a copy of Archibald’s draft from *Human Events* remains unclear. (Reached by phone, Winter hung up when questioned about Archibald’s piece.)” Of course, just how Coombs got a copy of Archibald’s article from *Human Events* “remains unclear” because neither I nor anyone else at *Human Events* had anything to do with sending it to her.

Also, I did not hang up on Blumenthal. I don’t hang up on people. In all the weeks he was working on his article, Blumenthal never once called me on my office phone, through which I am readily accessible. When I did eventually get a call from him, it was on my cellphone. The connection was very fuzzy, and I barely made out who was calling before the

connection was broken. He never called back on my cellphone or office phone. Possibly he was afraid that if he reached me, he would find out that the tales about me and *Human Events* he wanted to include in his story were not true.

THOMAS S. WINTER

Editor in chief, *Human Events*

BLUMENTHAL REPLIES

New York City

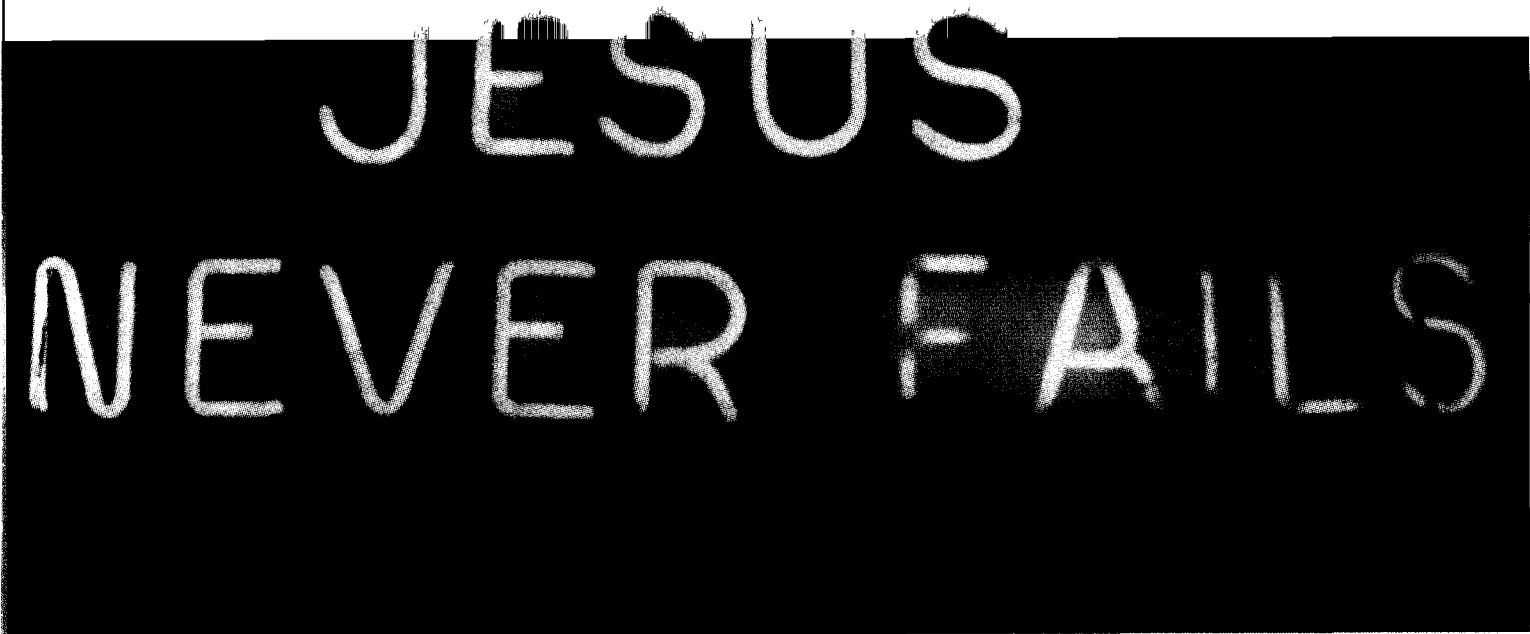
■ Thomas Winter’s contention—that my report on his spiking of George Archibald’s story on the *Washington Times* is a “fabrication”—is a naked exercise in projection. Possibly he was afraid that if he reached me he would have been forced to acknowledge his role in whitewashing reporting on racism and sexism at the *Times*. Archibald has provided me with a lengthy e-mail correspondence in which Winter gives his “guarantee” of running Archibald’s piece, then withdraws his promise after being pressured by *Human Events* editor Terry Jeffrey, a former

editorial writer for the *Times* who, Archibald says, is a close friend of Wes Pruden and Fran Coombs, the *Times*’s top two editors.

On September 4, after receiving Archibald’s pitch, Winter e-mailed him a promise to run his piece: “As I said,” Winter wrote, “you have my guarantee.... My prayers are with you.” Two days later, Winter changed his mind. “George—I just got back from Rehoboth and talked with Terry about this story,” Winter wrote Archibald. “There is too much potential libel in here for us to possibly run this.” According to Archibald, despite his claims of “libel,” Winter never showed Archibald’s story to *Human Events*’ lawyers.

When I reached Winter on his cellphone, he verbally acknowledged my statement that I was a reporter from *The Nation* who had questions about his spiking of Archibald’s story. Then, after a long pause, the line went dead. I called back, and he did not answer. Had he wanted to comment, he could have—and should have—returned my calls.

MAX BLUMENTHAL



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Sign in the sanctuary of Travelers Rest M.B. Church, South Racine Avenue, Chicago, 2004

CAMILLO JOSÉ VERGARA

In God's Country

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On November 4, 2004, two days after George W. Bush was narrowly re-elected President, the *New York Times* published a gloomy op-ed by historian Garry Wills titled “The Day the Enlightenment Went Out.” The United States, observed Wills, was “a product of Enlightenment values—critical intelligence, tolerance, respect for evidence, a regard for the secular sciences.” But, as the election results showed, these principles had given way to something new—“fundamentalist zeal, a rage at secularity, religious intolerance, fear of and hatred for modernity.” Wills was hardly alone in this reading. “The reelection of a president such as George W. Bush,” declared Michael Tomasky of *The American Prospect*, “is a culminating event in the political retreat of modernity, a condition of existence whose fundamental tenet was the triumph of scientific skepticism over what used to be called ‘blind’ faith.”

Who exactly upheld this tenet Tomasky didn't say. Certainly not the nine in ten Americans who have said they've never doubted the existence of God. Or the eight in ten who believe the Lord works miracles. Or the same number who are certain they

will be called to answer for their sins on Judgment Day. Or the tens of millions who attend church every week—more, in a typical seven-day span, than those who turn out for all sporting events combined. These figures are drawn from the 1990 book *Under God*, by Garry Wills. As Wills pointed out at the time, the idea that urbanization, scientific progress and rising living standards would gradually transform America into a secular society has long appealed to journalists and intellectuals. Talk about blind faith. In reality, noted Wills, “nothing has been more stable in our history, nothing less budgeable, than religious belief and practice.”

The source of this stability is not, as some right-wing demagogues now insist, that the Founding Fathers were devout evangelicals who viewed America as a Christian nation and who would have sided

with conservatives in today's culture wars. As Brooke Allen points out in *Moral Minority*, most of the Founders were deists and Unitarians who rejected doctrines like the Incarnation. Thomas Jefferson dismissed the Trinity as "incomprehensible jargon." He and other Founders made no mention of God in the Constitution, and took pains not to establish an official church on US soil. And yet, as various scholars have noted, disestablishment grew out of respect, not disdain, for religion, which, James Madison observed, "flourishes in greater purity without [rather] than with the aid of government." He was right. The level of religious observance in America has long dwarfed that in various European countries where official churches still exist. It has remained exceptionally robust despite periodic predictions of its imminent decline. In the 1960s, for example, falling church membership stirred much excited talk about the so-called "death of God." Somebody forgot to inform the American people, an overwhelming majority of whom told pollsters they were believers. When, a decade later, a Baptist deacon named Jimmy Carter was elected President, the media discovered that tens of millions of Americans considered themselves born-again, which had been true for some time but had managed to escape most commentators' notice.

It doesn't get overlooked much these days. From Frank Rich to Kevin Phillips, author of the recent bestseller *American Theocracy*, sounding the alarm about America's transformation into a Christian version of fundamentalist Iran has become a popular sport (not to mention a savvy career move) among critics of the Bush Administration. The sense of alarm is, to some degree, understandable. It's undeniably true that the Republican Party and the religious right have grown increasingly hard to distinguish in recent years. It's also evident that some Christian fundamentalists want to live in a country purged of people who don't think exactly like themselves (which would exclude not only atheists and agnostics but the majority of people of faith). On the other hand, many secular people apparently feel the same way. Shortly after John Kerry's defeat in the 2004 election, an e-mail made the rounds among disgruntled Democrats suggesting that the United States be divided into two nations: the liberal coasts (where the educated, open-minded people live) and "Jesusland" (where the zealots reside). The only way to halt the retreat of modernity, it appeared, was for the cosmopolitan blue states to secede from the increasingly intolerant white evangelical heartland.

One problem with this view is that a large number of evangelical Christians don't live in the Bible Belt. Another is that many of them aren't white. Some years ago, the Chilean-born photographer Camilo José Vergara began taking pictures of places like La Sinagoga, a Latino church located in a run-down neighborhood of junkyards and metal shops in Brooklyn, and Emmanuel Baptist Rescue Mission,

former warehouses, nightclubs, five-and-dime stores, movie theaters, car dealerships, hotels and slaughterhouses. Some are sandwiched between crumbling buildings on desolate blocks. Others lack steeples, crosses, choir platforms, even bathrooms, yet nevertheless bring residents together in lively, often frenzied services where worshipers shake, dance, speak in tongues, sing, weep, wail, fall to their knees, and pray for deliverance and God's grace.

What draws inner-city blacks and Latinos to such places? The same thing that attracts people to religion in many down-and-out places—a hunger for meaning and transcendence in a world that can seem brutally harsh and unforgiving, a sense of community and fellowship that evidently goes unmet otherwise. At many of the churches Vergara visits, pastors speak of the Bible as the literal truth and of the universe's Creator as an omnipotent force with the power to heal the sick, rescue the damned and work miracles. Theologically, in other words, the places where the "other half" worships are a lot closer to the revival-friendly pockets of the Deep South than to Manhattan's Upper West Side. They are peopled by women like Queen Lucretia Smith, an African-American faith healer who was among the first female pastors in Chicago, and Lawrence Moore, a former dope dealer and petty thief who now ministers to the homeless in California and says, "Everything comes from God. There are some that He chooses to go through a life of hardship and pain, and there are others that go through a life of prosperity and riches."

Skeptics might dismiss such talk as the sort of faith-based pabulum that members of the Bush Administration would appreciate. And the White House has indeed made no secret of its desire to build bridges to minority groups through inner-city churches, not least in the hope that ministers will drum home the message that poor people should look to God (rather than, say, government programs) for salvation. It's one more way religion might appear to play into the hands of the right, and the pastors quoted in Vergara's book do occasionally sound like Republicans. Some dismiss homosexuality as an "abomination." Others tell their congregations that wives must obey their husbands because this is what the Bible says. Surveys indicate that religiously observant African-American Protestants are only slightly less likely than their white counterparts to agree that sexual relations between two adults of the same gender are "always wrong."

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY

MORAL MINORITY: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers.

By Brooke Allen.

Ivan R. Dee. 256 pp. \$24.95.

HOW THE OTHER HALF WORSHIPS.

By Camilo José Vergara.

Rutgers. 283 pp. \$49.95.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS: What They Think and What They Believe.

By Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout. Chicago. 206 pp. \$22.50.

THY KINGDOM COME: An Evangelical's Lament: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America.

By Randall Balmer.

Basic. 242 pp. \$24.95.

WELCOME TO DOOMSDAY.

By Bill Moyers.

New York Review Books. 56 pp. \$7.95.

THE THEOCONS: Secular America Under Siege.

By Damon Linker.

Doubleday. 272 pp. \$26.

LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN NATION.

By Sam Harris.

Knopf. 96 pp. \$16.95.

A GODLY HERO: The Life of William Jennings Bryan.

By Michael Kazin. Knopf. 374 pp. \$30.

OUR ENDANGERED VALUES: America's Moral Crisis.

By Jimmy Carter.

Simon & Schuster. 224 pp. Paper \$15.

which is situated on a corner of Skid Row, Los Angeles, where drug dealers ply their trade. The photographs in Vergara's richly documented, visually arresting book, *How the Other Half Worships*, illustrate how indelibly religious most poor minority communities in America are, not least because in many blighted urban neighborhoods churches are the only viable institutions around. Trekking through the back streets and barrios of twenty-one different cities, Vergara spots churches tucked away in

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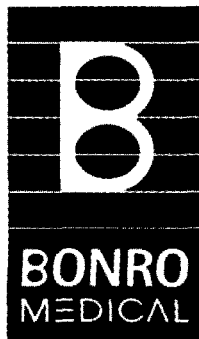
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Before rushing to assume such people are Bush supporters, it's worth noting that there is no evidence the more pious members of minority groups have been drifting into the ranks of the GOP. In fact, the opposite may be true. As sociologists Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout point out in their new book, *The Truth About Conservative Christians*, the most devout African-Americans—those who read the Bible daily and view it as the “word of God”—were also those most likely to support Democrats in the 1992–2000 presidential elections. The same religious zeal that pushes some whites to the right, in other words, leads blacks in the opposite direction, and not only at the polling booth. A generation ago, it was churchgoing black people who spearheaded the civil rights movement, a faith-based struggle that historians like David Chappell have likened to a religious revival.

How, Greeley and Hout ask, do pundits routinely equate biblical Christianity with right-wing politics when African-Americans, “who are in nearly every respect as religiously conservative as whites,” nevertheless “vote overwhelmingly for Democrats?” By, it appears, mistakenly assuming all Bible-believing Christians

than most pundits think. Between 1992 and 2000, 80 percent of the affluent members of these denominations voted for Republicans, but fewer than half of those who are poor did so. Even on abortion, such voters hardly speak in one voice. According to the National Opinion Research Center, the number of conservative Protestants who oppose abortion under all circumstances is a whopping 14 percent, less than the 22 percent who are consistently prochoice. Most hold views somewhere in the middle. These are the scary inhabitants of “Jesusland” many analysts wrongly assume march in lockstep with the religious right.

To point this out is not to deny that America is awash in right-wing preachers who invoke the Bible to promote a range of reactionary causes. As he drove from George Bush International Airport in Houston to Longview, Texas, not long ago, Randall Balmer, a professor of American religious history at Barnard College and an evangelical Christian, tuned in to the radio and heard, among other things, that the case for evolution is crumbling, that “Satan wants the United States to be kind to pluralism” and that the Constitution provides no guarantee of personal privacy.

Such rhetoric has become the stock in trade of conservative talk-radio and now permeates large swaths of an evangelical subculture whose members tended to look askance at politics only a few decades ago. The influence of this newly mobilized constituency is distressingly apparent in everything from the debate about stem-cell research to the appointment of federal judges to US policy toward Israel. Even so, exaggerating that influence

serves little purpose, save to reinforce the impression that America has fallen prey to a reactionary form of dogmatic Christianity and that the religious right has a popular mandate for its agenda.

The latter notion developed into a veritable dogma after the 2004 election, as pundits seized on an exit poll showing 22 percent of voters ranked “moral values” as their top priority, above such issues as the economy and Iraq. The Dark Ages, apparently, had arrived. The Moral Majority had finally become a majority. Only

later was it noted that a comparable percentage of voters had listed values as their foremost concern in 1996 (the year Bill Clinton was re-elected), and that Bush almost certainly defeated Kerry because of his large edge on national security. A few months after this came Congress and Bush's intervention in the Terri Schiavo case, which again prompted observers to marvel at America's startling turn toward right-wing Christian fundamentalism. Yet 82 percent of Americans opposed Congress and the President's action.

As the Schiavo fiasco showed, many members of Congress do march in lockstep with the religious right: According to Bill Moyers, forty-five senators and 186 members of the 108th Congress received an approval rating of 80 percent or higher from the most powerful Christian advocacy groups. That is an alarming fact. In *Welcome to Doomsday*, an expanded version of an essay that originally appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, Moyers goes on to argue that the religious right is so powerful these days it now has a hammerlock on environmental policy as well. Belief in the biblical prophecy predicting the impending onset of the Rapture, he notes, has led some ministers to insist there's no point in worrying about things like global warming, since life as we know it will soon end anyway.

“You can understand why people in the grip of such fantasies cannot be expected to worry about the environment,” writes Moyers. But if this is such a problem, why do a clear majority of Americans back strong environmental protections? The Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, bills protecting federal wetlands: All these things enjoy robust support from the same population breathlessly awaiting the Rapture. The rollback of environmental laws in recent years is real enough (and has been documented on television by nobody more thoroughly than Moyers, it must be said). But, as Moyers himself notes, in 2004 the National Association of Evangelicals issued a statement affirming that the government “has an obligation to protect its citizens from the effects of environmental degradation.” Earlier this year, a group of eighty-six evangelical leaders published a joint declaration echoing this. “Our commitment to Jesus Christ compels us to solve the global warming crisis,” it stated. The problem is not the stranglehold evangelical Christians have on environmental policy (if only this were so!) but the one exerted by corporations and antiregulation zealots like Grover Norquist.



South Crenshaw Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1999

are reactionary white Southerners who write monthly checks to the likes of Jerry Falwell. As a survey by *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* found, a majority of evangelicals actually hold an unfavorable view of Falwell. A large number appear to care more about jobs and the economy than issues like gay marriage and abortion. Greeley and Hout provide strong evidence that among white conservative Protestants—a category that includes denominations such as Southern Baptists, Pentecostals and Mormons—class indeed matters a lot more

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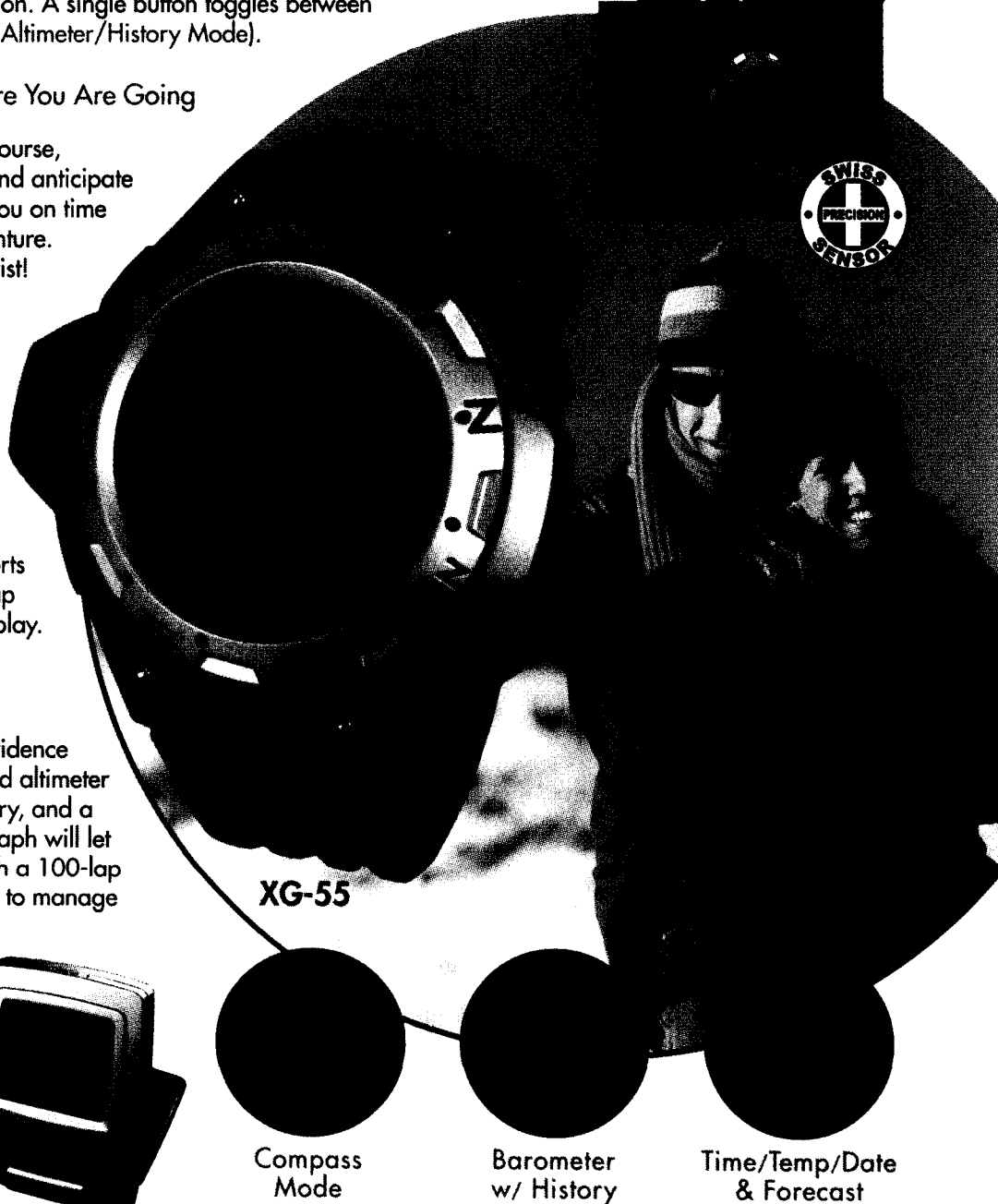
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When it comes to cultural matters, the religious right obviously does play a prominent role in shaping the GOP's agenda. It has done so by claiming to speak on behalf of the Bible-believing masses against the God-hating secular elites. In the same breath, of course, right-wing theologians routinely describe America as a fallen country whose entire culture has rotted to the core. One cannot have it both ways, a point made by Damon Linker in his illuminating new book *The Theocons*, which focuses on a small but influential group of right-wing Catholic thinkers organized around the journal *First Things*, where Linker used to be an editor. The journal was founded in the early 1990s by Father Richard Neuhaus, a Catholic priest who nowadays is chummy with George W. Bush and Karl Rove. Back in the 1960s, Neuhaus kept rather different company: He was a radical Lutheran pastor who, along with Father Daniel Berrigan and Rabbi Abraham Heschel, headed the group Clergy Concerned About Vietnam. In 1970 he published an essay,

the unaccountable elites, a claim so pervasive these days that Americans who are prochoice, support stem-cell research and don't actually believe the judiciary should be abolished might well assume they're vastly outnumbered. But they're not. The Neuhauses of the world are right that the United States is a lot more religious than the media and many intellectuals think. But they're wrong that most Americans see eye to eye with them. In fact, on many issues, most churchgoing Americans don't, which is perhaps why, as Linker shows, Neuhaus and other theocons have been quite content to see the will of the majority thwarted by elites when it has served their minority agenda. Not a peep was raised in the pages of *First Things*, for example, when the Supreme Court intervened to prevent a recount in the 2000 election. Neuhaus actually praised the decision, just as he and others will surely laud the Justices if they overturn *Roe v. Wade*, even though a majority of the public opposes this. Selective in their populism, the theocons are equally selective in their adherence to church doc-

be a punishable crime. It is perfectly fair for Americans who disagree with such views to say so—the louder the better. It is nevertheless a mistake to dismiss those who hold them either as victims of false consciousness or as fools, the way Sam Harris does in his slender, entertaining but misleadingly titled new book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, which is actually addressed to people like himself who want to get a good laugh at the expense of those silly enough to believe in God. Harris's unabashed disdain for all forms of religion is in some ways bracing—he has as little patience for moderate believers as for biblical literalists. And much in his letter will likely prove amusing to atheists and agnostics fed up with hearing pastors insist that only the church is capable of viewing the world through a moral prism. "According to the most common interpretation of biblical prophecy," he writes,

Jesus will return only after things have gone horribly awry here on earth. It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to say that if the city of New York were suddenly replaced by a ball of fire, some significant percentage of the American population would see a silver lining in the subsequent mushroom cloud, as it would suggest to them that the best thing that is ever going to happen was about to happen: the return of Christ.

One can practically hear Upper West Side liberals chuckling to themselves, aghast at the irrationality of the heartland. But one wonders if they'll nod approvingly as Harris turns his attention to Muslims. "It is now a truism in foreign policy circles that real reform in the Muslim world cannot be imposed from the outside," he observes. "But it is important to recognize why this is so—it is so because most Muslims are utterly deranged by their religious faith."

Harris belongs to a group that Timothy Garton Ash recently described as "secular fundamentalists." He is an engaging writer, and the popularity of his book suggests that many people think it is about time the faith community received its comeuppance. But by his standard, many African-Americans who took part in the civil rights movement were also deranged. So were others who gathered in church basements during the 1980s to stop the Reagan Administration from arming death squads in Central America (among whose victims were many nuns and priests who preached liberation theology). So was William Jennings Bryan, the populist

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"The Thorough Revolutionary," in which he openly advocated the overthrow of the US government and criticized Che Guevara from the left, upbraiding the Argentine guerrilla leader for his "unwillingness to use terrorism" to seize power. Two decades later, in 1996, *First Things* published a forum titled "The End of Democracy?" in which Neuhaus again pondered revolution, this time from the right. The US government, abetted by courts that affirmed the legality of abortion and other moral abominations, had evolved into a tyranny that "cannot command the consent of the people," he wrote. This made "morally justified revolution" a reasonable option.

Then as now, Neuhaus wrote as if he were speaking for a silent majority against

trine: Michael Novak, another *First Things* contributor, believes American women should be forced to accept the Vatican's teachings on abortion, but he went to Rome at the invitation of President Bush's ambassador to defend the war in Iraq, which the Pope staunchly opposed. From the death penalty to poverty, what the church says can be ignored, except when its encyclicals support the right side in the culture wars, in which case everyone must take note.

There are, of course, millions of Americans who would rejoice if *Roe* were reversed, just as there are many who think the separation of church and state is a myth, that mandatory school prayer should be reinstated and that sex between two consenting adults of the same gender should

CAMILLO JOSÉ VERGARA

orator and born-again Christian who for several decades served as the voice the excluded in America, supporting everything from legalizing strikes to progressive taxation, and whose passion and appeal Michael Kazin convincingly demonstrates in a new biography, *A Godly Hero*, were inextricably related to his biblical faith. So was the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, perhaps the greatest moral agitator of the nineteenth century, whose abhorrence of slavery, according to his biographer Henry Mayer, "cannot be understood outside the context of the Christianity that was its inspiration." "Nothing but extensive revivals of pure religion can save our country," wrote Garrison in 1831, the year he began publishing *The Liberator*, a statement that might have led the secularists of his era to brand him a fanatic, which is indeed how many of his less devout contemporaries saw him. "Radical popular religion helped eradicate an evil with which socially liberal theological opinion had learned to coexist," notes Mayer.

The same religious conviction that has propelled many conservatives to support George W. Bush in recent years also motivates many progressive people of faith to volunteer at homeless shelters and turn out for antiwar rallies. Churches have played a major role in the recent wave of demonstrations on behalf of undocumented immigrants' rights. They have been active for decades in assisting the needy, not least because, as Randall Balmer notes, the Bible contains roughly 2,000 references to the poor (compared with zero explicit mentions of abortion). If faith in God helps explain why Bush has been such a terrible President, it also explains why Jimmy Carter has been such an admirable former one. In his latest book, *Our Endangered Values*, a scathing critique of the religious right's misplaced priorities, Carter, a devout Baptist, admits that he never prayed more frequently than during his four years in the White House. He also eloquently articulates why, in his view, religion should foster compassion and humility, not the arrogance and intolerance that many of his Bush-supporting fellow Baptists project these days.

There are, to be sure, plenty of religious people whose ideas are decidedly less attractive than Carter's: imams who insist a newspaper editor should be executed for insulting the Prophet Muhammad; "prolife" activists who believe in the morality of shooting doctors who perform abortions; Israeli zealots who advocate "transfer," i.e., the expulsion of Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories. But there's also no shortage of secular people who have

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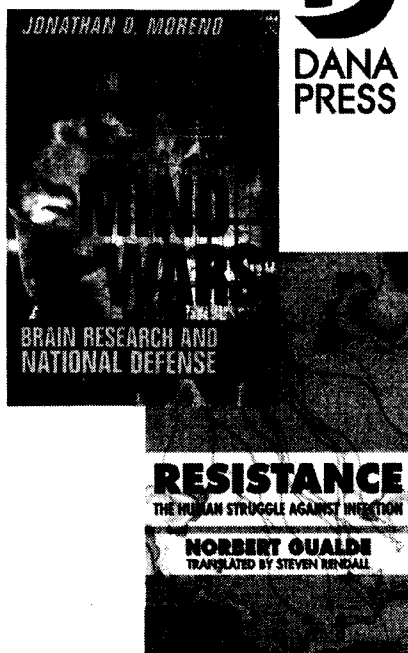
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propagated murderous ideas through the years. Hitler hardly mentioned God, and Pol Pot, Stalin and Mao never mentioned God at all. The President of Iran may be a Holocaust-denying Muslim, but he is arguably no more dangerous than the atheist dictator running North Korea. Intolerant and repressive worldviews come in many forms. So does an air of self-righteousness and moral superiority. In this regard, at least Sam Harris is consistent. Conservatives like David Brooks have no problem seeing Muslim fundamentalists as fascists and fanatics who threaten the Enlightenment (the love affair with the anti-Soviet Afghan mujahedeen came to an end on 9/11), but they are far more forgiving when it comes to Christian fundamentalists in the American heartland and Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Some on the far left, by contrast, do the opposite, happily disparaging Bible Belt Christians while giving a pass to Islamist forces in Palestine, Iraq and southern Lebanon. When it comes to the latter, care is taken to understand what draws people to Islam—the failure of sec-

ular ideologies, the persistence of occupation, the yearning for dignity, the fear that cultural traditions are being uprooted. Might not some of the same factors be at play among born-again Christians in places like rural Alabama?

To acknowledge this hardly requires us to sympathize with the Christian right's social agenda, any more than attempting to understand why people join groups like Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood demands that one accepts their views on the status of women or gays. Nor does a less dismissive attitude toward religion mean secular progressives should cede ground to right-wing ministers who insist an absence of faith renders people incapable of distinguishing right from wrong or acting compassionately. It does mean the secular left should think twice before seeing religious people as their foes, not least since such an attitude risks alienating many potential allies and confining ourselves to a small sect of like-minded believers. This, after all, is what fundamentalism is about. ■

MUSIC

Down by Law

K. LEANDER WILLIAMS

TODD SNIDER

Much like a gifted kid who studies exhaustively for the spelling bee and then blows the two-syllable word, the roots rock-inspired hippie Todd Snider seemed unprepared for his close-up on *The Late Show With David Letterman* earlier this fall. Snider is a certified ace at performing troubadour style—just his voice, wits and a guitar. But for his national television debut he assembled a band, to which the show's cameramen responded by shifting the performance's focus away from him and toward guitarist Will Kimbrough, who was considerably more animated. By the end of the three-minute ditty "Unbreakable," you'd have been forgiven for wondering why the shoeless slacker-type with the too-cool fedora obscuring his eyes was deemed worthy of a segment at all.

The millions tuning in might not have

known that Snider's missed opportunity was almost the latest peak in a mid-career renaissance. A 40-year-old whose upbringing in Bible Belt boomtowns brought him to his current home base near the ghetto in East Nashville, Snider has spent the past decade and a half barnstorming across America. Along the way, his half-dozen or so record-label affiliations have earned him a coterie of mature loyalists, the kind of folks who understand that the circuitous road to success is paved with richly detailed songs. Snider's latest release, *The Devil You Know*, isn't his first disc on a major label subsidiary—that distinction goes to his mid-'90s stint on Jimmy Buffett's now-defunct Margaritaville Records. But like its 2004

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predecessor, the masterful *East Nashville Skyline* (recorded for John Prine's Oh Boy! imprint), the album has inherited the yarn-spinning of the Nashville-outsider genre alt-country while dispensing with the romance of outlaws and losers that often makes the genre seem both wrong-headed and condescendingly boho. "I want to know if you belong or feel abandoned," Snider writes in the new album's liner notes, quoting poet-spiritualist David Whyte. In its effort to parse hard truths about survival in Bush's America, Snider's music stands alongside the work of artists like Buddy and Julie Miller, Gillian Welch and Rodney Crowell as part of a God-fearing country-and-western left wing that carries even more creative weight than twangy cause célèbres Steve Earle and the Dixie Chicks.

And yet Snider would be the first to admit that his audience, for all its devotion, does not always agree with him. These days, one of the staples of his live set is a comic provocation from *East Nashville Skyline* called "Conservative, Christian, Right-Wing Republican, Straight White American Males" (check the video-sharing site YouTube for a clip). Although Snider's charm gets him through it whether he's gigging a roadhouse or a more formal concert venue, he recently told an interviewer from *No Depression*, a bimonthly publication devoted to American roots music, what happens later, off-stage. "There's a part at the end of the show where you get to meet people," Snider recounted. "They like you, and you go from that element to the hotel or wherever. In between, there are people that are mad. And they've got a half a minute a night to go tell me I'm a dick.... I always just think, 'I wish that guy hadn't called me a dick.'" Ultimately, the songsmith is philosophical about it: "If the idea that you were a dick overwhelmed your show, though, that'd be something you'd have to address."

Notwithstanding the subjects in "Conservative, Christian," most of Snider's recent characters are hard-luck types. He breathes quite a bit of humanity into portraits of men and women taking repeated trips down the low road, which suggests that Snider is well aware that life can't be so bad if your major complaint is that someone called you an expletive after a sold-out show, or that you came up short during a TV appearance, or even that Garth Brooks scored a hit with a melody that was legally pilfered from you. That last fate befell Snider as a result of a bizarre turn of events that he now mines for

comedy when introducing his new song "If Tomorrow Never Comes." Details are sketchy, but the upshot is that the melody of one of Brooks's earliest hits—a ballad also titled "If Tomorrow Never Comes"—bears an eerie resemblance to Snider's frat-boy anthem "Beer Run." Snider has never taken legal action against the Brooks collaborator credited with the alleged theft, but he states plainly both onstage and in the liner notes to *The Devil You Know* that his new song—a sort of Jerry Lee Lewis-style mix of hymnal and raucous fire—is a somewhat laughable attempt at stealing the melody back. It's a "way to let the guy

know that I love him and his version of 'Beer Run.'"

It would seem that bitterness isn't in Snider's vocabulary; revenge fantasies certainly don't haunt his sleep. As a poet of those doomed to make the worst choices from among very limited options, he's even willing to entertain the idea that some other guys who stole from him—at gunpoint in a Memphis back alley several years ago—might have it a lot worse than he does. Memorializing his mugging in a new song called "The Highland Street Incident," Snider casts him-

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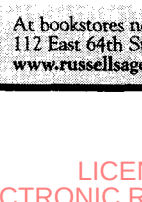
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self as the gang's ringleader, not the victim. The crunch of the piece's guitar tremolos place an eerily accessible shine on the sociopath's powers of persuasion. "It was harder to imagine/Than it was to do," the protagonist reminds his skeptical cohorts about the deed, though it's unclear whether Snider is referring to his own meeting with the bandits or a caper that preceded it. He won't make excuses for them, though. The pretzel logic in the chorus is a harbinger of other victims to come: "Did we get arrested?/No, we did not/We didn't shoot anyone/Didn't get shot/Didn't hurt anyone/At least not a lot/And we got what we wanted."

Snider performed that song to what seemed like stunned silence at the Canal Room in New York recently, and thankfully the quiet was more attentive than hostile. His profile has grown both critically and commercially since the release of *East Nashville Skyline*, and the smartass cool he maintained before this record has given way to politically charged wit; even a lovesick piece like "Carla" alludes to forms of triangulation. ("Tryin' to fill my head with doubt," he reminds the woman who took her sweet time leaving him. "You nearly had me walking out on you.")

Given the presence of Al Franken on

Letterman's couch the evening of Snider's visit, it's safe to say that those who tuned in to see the singer were hoping he'd stir up partisan trouble by playing "You Got Away With It (A Tale of Fraternity Brothers)," a folk ballad that has been making the rounds of lefty radio and blogs since the spring, well before *The Devil You Know* was released. More of a voiceover with strumming than a song, the piece apotheosizes the most engaging qualities of his performing style: His plain-spoken delivery draws you in, while his guitar facilitates confession, reflection, rambling. Snider's first-person narrative of a wealthy aging man reminiscing with an old friend about a shared past of hippie-bashing, alcoholism and other secret misadventures turns somewhat acidic at the end, when the narrator lets on that his smooth-talking drinking buddy now has the run of Camp David. While Snider may be guilty of preaching to the choir with his Dubya allusion, the ploy makes the track funnier because it's less, rather than more, believable. It's pure fantasy, and Snider knows it. The song's last line ("You'll get away with this new thing, too") is too vague and cryptic to be a true zinger (is he talking about Iraq?), but doubtless all kinds of couch potatoes have heard it and shaken a fist at the television, whether in anger or solidarity.

In the end, the songwriter's flair for the absurd may be what separates him from the average folkie or country singer. Both the new album and *East Nashville Skyline* suggest that while maturity (and more than one stint in rehab) has transformed Snider from barroom wiseacre to keen observer of life at the fringes of the workaday American mainstream, his comedic chops have become sharp enough to rival Randy Newman's. In "Sunshine," for instance, a potential suicide enjoys a beer on a ledge as a crowd of people gathers down below—some of whom suggest that he jump. How does he feel? "Like captain of the team." Then there's the moment when the itinerant pool shark in "Just Like Old Times" nearly gets arrested in a motel room with a former teenage crush who now makes her living as a prostitute. "Don't get all sentimental on me now, girl," he tells her, after dismissing the cops by retrieving an old high school picture from his wallet. "You haven't even told me what your new name is." Taken together, it's all of a piece with the lone lyric he raises his voice to sing somewhere in the middle of "The Devil You Know": "There's a war goin' on/That the poor can't win."

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FILMS

The Tracks of My Tears

STUART KLAWANS

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The first time I watched Penélope Cruz lip-sync "Volver," the old song that lends its sentiments and title to Pedro Almodóvar's new film, I wept—though why, I couldn't have said. The voice was dubbed; the musical idiom had been shifted, with Spanish imperiousness, from tango to flamenco; and the character's deepest motivations could only be guessed at, since Almodóvar was waiting for the final reel to reveal them. As perfect moments go, this one was odd and incomplete; and yet, when a plump droplet spilled across Cruz's eyelashes, tears came to me, too.

The next time, of course, I was prepared. Now every implication of the scene was known; every seam of Almodóvar's narrative stitchery had been exposed. I wept even more, as the title might have foretold. *Volver*: to return. All the emotions came back.

What else returns in this beautifully improbable movie? The list might begin with an actress, Carmen Maura, who is closely identified with Almodóvar but had long been absent from his films. Next comes the character Maura plays: a ghostly mother who reinserts herself into her family's affairs, while giving off (despite death) the flatulent scent of life. Then there's a repeated wrong. Years ago, Maura's character unwittingly harmed her daughter (Cruz), who now has done much the same to her own teenage child (the indelible Yohana Cobo). Like the wind-powered turbines you periodically see in this movie—the characters having come from a town of incessant gales, which are said to drive people crazy—the story keeps spinning back to these recurring elements, and more: a scuffed suitcase, a native landscape, a good deed, a corpse.

Memories of older films return as well, as they often do in Almodóvar's work. They are for him what biblical texts used to be for English poets: basic materials of thought. And so in *Volver* he imitates a bit of *Psycho* here, some *Mildred Pierce* there, to articulate his ideas. If I had to explain the themes in general terms, I'd say they concern the sin of not seeing what's before your eyes. *Volver* is about invisibility as a just punishment for this sin; about the false visibility, or self-exposure, promoted by a degraded form of show business; and about

the revelations made possible, by contrast, through a true performance, which can be public and personal at the same time. Most of all, though, *Volver* is an exciting crime story, comedy and tear-jerker about the ways these themes may loop back through generations of women.

Which just goes to show you: To explain *Volver* in general is to explain nothing at all. That's why Almodóvar needs his scriptures, including (most significantly) a clip from Visconti's *Bellissima*. A segment of that film, appearing late in *Volver*, encapsulates the events as no synopsis could. It also transforms Cruz retrospectively into another example of something that returns. Implicitly, the excerpt makes her a double of *Bellissima*'s star, Anna Magnani.

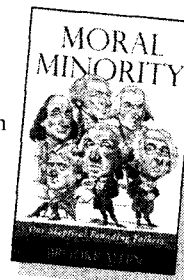
As types, the two are not much alike, except for their swarming heaps of dark hair. Cruz pokes skyward instead of pulling toward the earth; she lingers over her emotions, nestling them within, rather than hurling them out impatiently. Whereas Magnani instinctively, famously, shouted for help, Cruz is capable of suffering in silence. But as Almodóvar knows, his star can stride through a working-class district with all the authority of her predecessor. She, too, can seem to carry in her limbs the weight of a long day's labor. And if her body is too finely drawn to be entirely convincing in her present role—"These characters are always big-assed women," Almodóvar has written, "and Penélope is too slim"—a loving director knows how to show off what flesh there is. In an early shot that summarizes much in *Volver* and foreshadows more, Almodóvar photographs Cruz from directly above, so that the perspective lines run down the inner surface of her breasts into the profound shadows of a cleavage that the costumer keeps perpetually exposed. The character is standing at a kitchen sink, stoically washing the evening's dishes, while you gaze over this site of troubled, uncontain-

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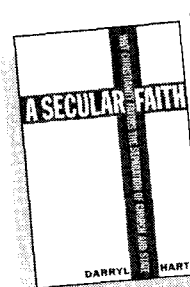
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able sexuality, looking down toward the object at the vanishing point: a very large, very sharp knife, which will only temporarily remain clean.

Of course, any dramatist can bring out a knife in act one. But once the knife has been used, it takes an Almodóvar to blend realism instantaneously into melodrama, and melodrama into a moment of comic relief that's cutting in its own right. First Cruz's character feels the full moral gravity of her situation; then, though worn out by a day on the job, she has to set to work again with mop and rubber gloves. When interrupted at her grim task by a knock on the door, she next must hold off a friendly but inquisitive neighbor. "Did you hurt yourself?" he asks solicitously, having noticed a splash of blood on her neck. Fortunately, Cruz knows what makes men look away. With a dismissive wave of her hand, she explains, "Female trouble."

I give away this joke—and only this one, I promise—because it so neatly demonstrates the superiority of *Volver*'s women to its men. For a long while, in fact, you might imagine there aren't any men, but only one man here, another there. Taken singly, they're pretty bad, or weakly good. Viewed in a cluster—as they're seen, I think, only once—they can literally make a character gasp.

The women, by contrast, are almost always shown in a group: organizing meals, doing one another's hair, exchanging stories, giving or receiving aid. Much of the buoyancy and humor of *Volver* comes from this female conviviality—as when, for example, Cruz abruptly goes into the restaurant business and elicits impromptu help from half her neighborhood. Even the ghostly mother wants to be sociable—which is why she gets rid of her veil of loose white hair, so she will no longer look like one of Mizoguchi's spirits dressed in a cheap housecoat. Some of *Volver*'s biggest laughs come from Maura's down-to-earth manner, as she overcomes the indignities involved in rejoining human company. (When put in a tight spot, she can't just vanish, as a normal ghost would. She needs to duck under the bed, with the smile of a kid playing hide-and-seek.) At the end, though, when she once more returns to her solitude—or almost goes back to it—the sweetness of Maura's resignation gives the film its deepest pathos.

For that final return, Maura steps back into a region of timelessness—someplace that's separate from her daughter's world of bustle and worry ("I'm busy," Cruz continually complains) but is different as well from the conventional image of

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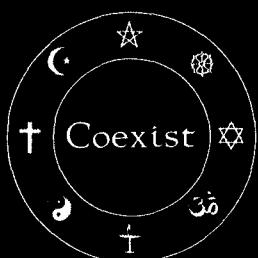
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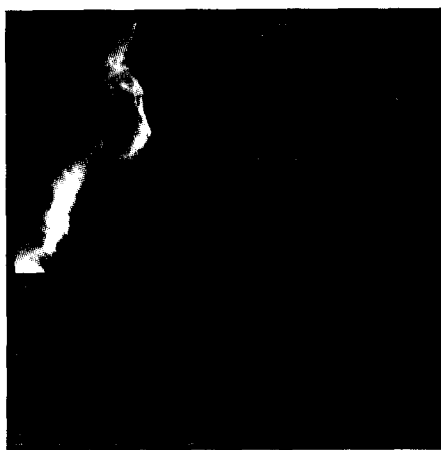
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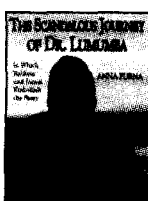
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eternity. The film starts in a small-town cemetery, where women are busy cleaning the tombs. It concludes within the shadows of an old provincial house, where Maura will tend not a slab of marble but another woman's body and spirit. Sociability and hope win out in *Volver* over solitude and despair—tentatively, just a little—if only because “ghosts aren't supposed to cry.”

The living may weep, though—which brings me back to that core scene in which Cruz performs the title song. I think “perform” is the right word, even though you hear someone else's voice, because Cruz makes her whole face sing: “Though time's passing, which wipes away the whole world/ By now has killed off my oldest, dearest dreams/ Still I hold within me, hidden like a treasure/ Just the simple hope to come back home.”

Why is she crying out these lines, and crying over them? On the public level, she is thanking the patrons of her restaurant, and maybe showing off a little for them. More privately, she sings because her mother, who's been lost, taught her “Volver” many years ago, and now she wants to give this song to her own daughter, who came close to being lost.

Cruz sings in two directions at once, to the past and the future, weeping for both. And if on first viewing you don't fully understand why she feels as she does, you weep for her anyway, just because she's there, in the present, alive. You, as her audience, help to make her so.

As many critics have pointed out, Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* is both a World War II epic and a pressing, critical commentary on today's events. Soon, I hope, I will have something to add to the discussion of this picture. For now, though, I feel it's more urgent that I tell you about James Longley's *Iraq in Fragments*, a nonfiction film that addresses contemporary reality without metaphor and yet is every bit as artful as Eastwood's movie.

It is practically handmade: produced, researched and shot in Iraq from 2003 through 2005 by Longley himself, who recorded both image and sound. He also edited the material (with Billy McMillin and Fiona Otway) and composed his own *musique concrète* for the soundtrack. The result, as you see from the start, is perhaps less a document than an impression, conveyed through partial glances, stream-of-consciousness juxtapositions, unpredictable rhythms, a collage of sound. Without apology, Longley offers you his fractured, subjective view of Iraq under US occupa-

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tion. What justifies the film, and makes it compelling, is the corresponding subjectivity of its Iraqi narrators, who lend this movie not only their voices but their eyes and ears.

Part one, set in a poor Sunni quarter of Baghdad, focuses on a fatherless 11-year-old, Mohammed Haithem, who was working in an auto-repair shop and flunking out of school for the third or fourth time. As Mohammed had come to fear his native city—which used to be beautiful, he said, but now was full of helicopters and tanks—so too did he cringe before his boss. “He loves me like a son,” Mohammed insists on the soundtrack. “He doesn’t swear at me or hit me.” At which point, you see the perpetually simmering, impecunious “father” strike Mohammed while shouting abuse at him for his tears.

Part two looks at the Shiite south through the eyes of Sheik Aws al-Kafaji, a cleric in Muqtada al-Sadr’s movement. But in this section, *Iraq in Fragments* also

goes beyond the individual viewpoint and becomes a film of masses: flagellants in a procession, protesters at a rally, vigilantes carrying out a punitive raid against liquor sellers. The sporadic, personalized violence of part one gives way to something seething, generalized, apocalyptic.

Part three moves north into a Kurdish farming area, where you again listen to a young boy. Unlike his counterpart in the first section, he can dream of attending medical school; and his elders speak of independence. At last you hear a note of hope—and yet the smoke billowing from nearby brick kilns reminds you of smoke you saw earlier, rising from the explosions in Baghdad.

No truth about the war can be found in *Iraq in Fragments*. Longley discovers only truths—in individuals, in masses of people, in landscapes—that fit together provisionally, if at all. That is the heartbreaking lesson of *Iraq in Fragments*, and its indispensable art. ■

EVENTS

ILLINOIS

John Nichols

■ League of Women Voters of Chicago presents John Nichols, co-author of *Tragedy and Farce* and correspondent for *The Nation* and the *Capital Times*. November 18, 2–4 PM. Columbia College, 1014 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL. For additional information call (312) 939-5935 ext. 27 or visit our website: www.LWVChicago.org. Tickets: \$35 adults, \$20 students with ID.

NEW YORK

Barbara Ehrenreich

■ Dos Pueblos New York–Tipitapa Sister City Project. Celebrating nineteen years of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua. Featuring journalist and author Barbara Ehrenreich and music presented by John Fisher with Jenny Murphy, Jim Rogers and Steve Siegelbaum. Sunday, November 5, 5–7 PM at the home of Helen Rosenthal and Carmen Marino. 225 W. 83rd St., New York, NY. Information: (646) 610-2215. RSVP: nov5event@tipitapa.org or Dos Pueblos 2576 Broadway, #305, New York, NY 10025.

Opposition Politics

■ Lewis Lapham and Gary Younge on Creating a Real Opposition Force in American Politics. Friday, November 10, 6:30 PM. The New School, Tishman Auditorium, 66 W. 12th St. Admission: \$8. Tickets: (212) 229-5488 or boxoffice@newschool.edu. Now that the midterm elections have passed, what will really change? While electing Democrats

is the establishment’s only prescription to counteract six disastrous years of Republican control in Washington, few people have any illusions that the Democratic Party represents a true opposition force in American politics. From their slavish devotion to corporate dominion to their hawkish support for Bush’s endless global war, chances are that the Democratic Party’s fate in the midterm elections will have little impact on the biggest issues of the day. Join two of the country’s favorite columnists, Gary Younge, the *Guardian* newspaper’s US correspondent and author of *Stranger in a Strange Land: Encounters in the Disunited States*, and Lewis Lapham, longtime editor and now editor emeritus of *Harper’s* magazine (winner of the National Magazine Award for his column’s “exhilarating point of view in an age of conformity”) and author of *Pretensions to Empire: Notes on the Criminal Folly of the Bush Administration*, for a discussion about what it will take to create a real opposition movement in America. Co-sponsored by The New School and The New Press.

Conference on Punishment

■ “The US Record,” a Social Research conference at The New School on who, what, why and how we punish. Thursday, November 30, and Friday, December 1, 66 W. 12th St., NYC. Join us as we examine the foundations of our ideas of punishment, explore the social effects of current practices and search for viable alternatives to our carceral state. Special event: Richard Gere and others reading prison writings. For information and to register: www.socres.org/punishment.

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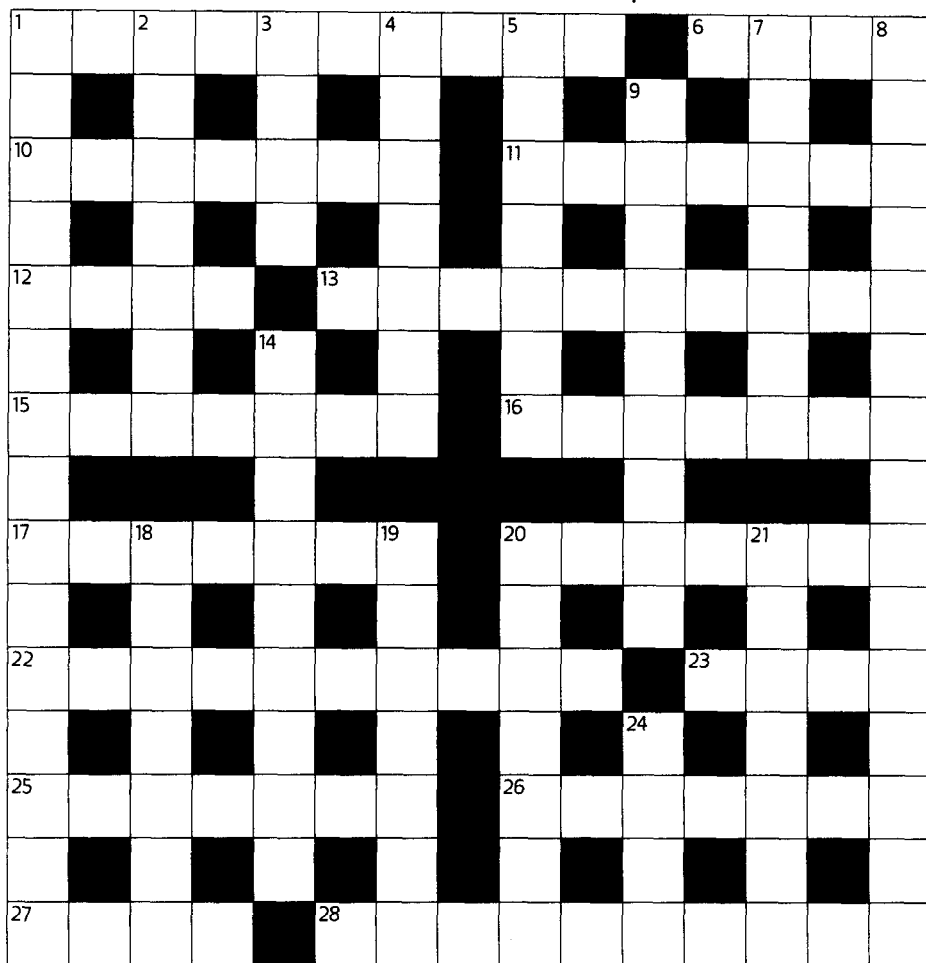
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ACROSS

- 1 Support something hammy, if game for it. (10)
 6 You might do it to your hat when someone is in trouble. (4)
 10 Some shoppers say they are just this. (7)
 11 Describing a loyal friend? Check! (7)
 12 and 13 Arrivals and departures are simple, if this is your way of life. (4,4,4,2)
 15 The "put-on" of artists' models? (7)
 16 Getting on this? We all may be eventually, or at least hope to be. (7)
 17 Those who see things clearly don't have to pay one very often. (7)
 20 Famous painting of Washington? (7)
 22 Its sole display might attract the attention of a buyer. (4,6)
 23 Possible result of a wound, not suffered by a Union man. (4)
 25 Back the last nag, as a Cockney might say. (7)
 26 Seemingly I am finished with nothing but paint! (7)
 27 One might want to 6 it, to give something a good try. (4)
 28 Supposedly Love gets a big laugh with such, and licks moths into shape. (10)

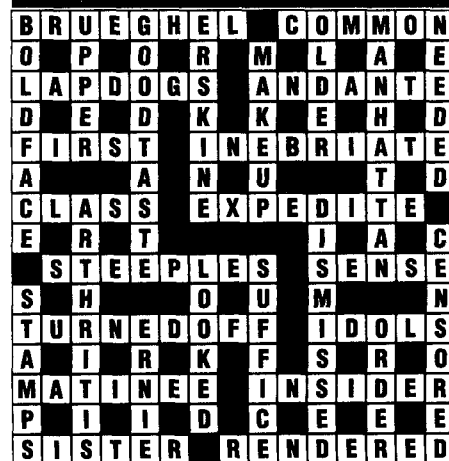
DOWN

- 1 One of those things that let you take a slug without shuddering. (6-5,4)
 2 and 18 What a kid does with a bat, hand over hand, opting for other than "down sides." (7,2,5)
 3 Vice with this, possibly, is close to hand, at the end of the pointer. (4)
 4 A leg up, familiarly, had a point—with unpleasant larva resulting. (7)
 5 A view of the obstetric ward might be blue, as some say. (7)
 7 One isn't pleased with his performance, or perhaps of anyone bad, right? (7)
 8 Annuals, as they say of the "good old golden rule days." (6,9)
 9 A good time for the vegetarian? (5,4)



- 14 Going in to pine, perhaps, having the lamb owner in sick ward. (9)
 18 See 2
 19 At a high point, having the wrong dope on what might be a danger to shipping. (7)
 20 The British award a silk-maker something that looks like the Washington Monument. (7)
 21 What the finicky type does at dinner when the miner's help took a chair. (5,2)
 24 Charts up what you don't want on your computer—or your plate! (4)

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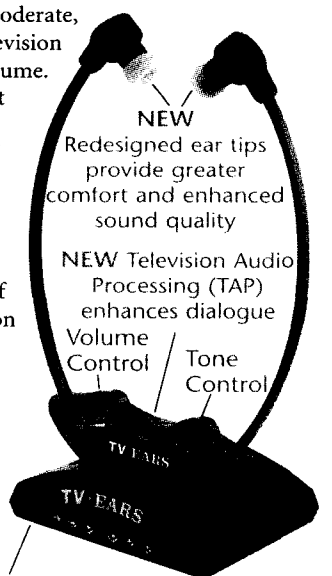
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— Darlene and Jack B., CA

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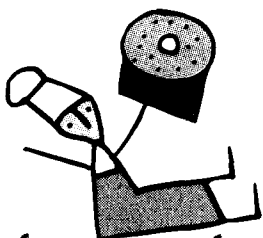
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